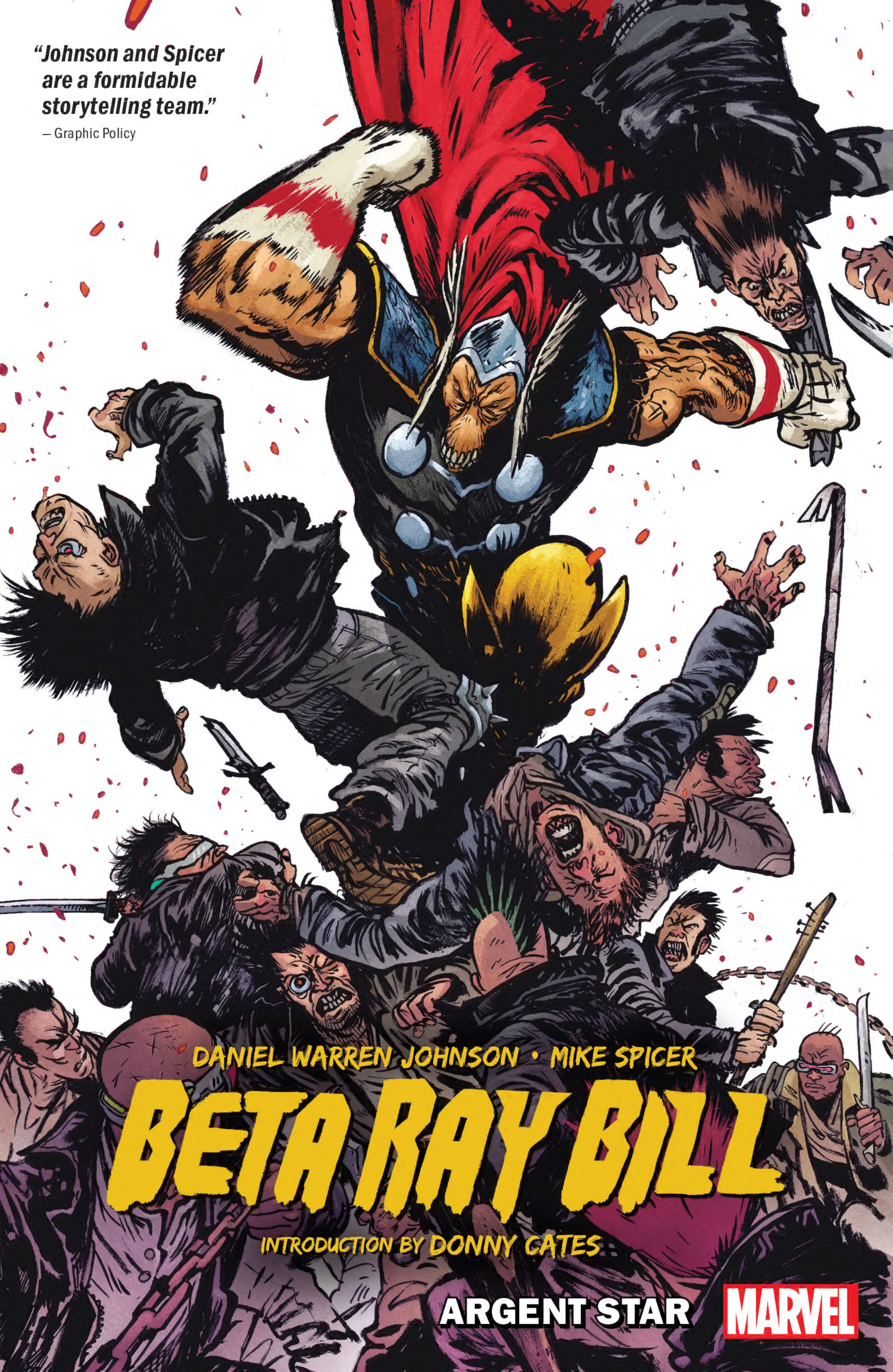


**"Johnson and Spicer
are a formidable
storytelling team."**
— Graphic Policy



DANIEL WARREN JOHNSON • MIKE SPICER

BETA RAY BILL

INTRODUCTION BY DONNY GATES

ARGENT STAR **MARVEL**

BETA RAY BILL

ARGENT STAR



BETA RAY BILL



TO HELP PROTECT HIS PEOPLE, THE KORBINITES, FROM SURTUR THE FIRE GOD, BETA RAY BILL WAS TRANSFORMED INTO A POWERFUL, HORSE-LIKE CYBORG. WHEN HE FIRST ENCOUNTERED THOR, BILL SURPRISED EVERYONE BY BEING ABLE TO LIFT MJOLNIR, EARNING HIM THE RESPECT OF ALL-FATHER ODIN, WHO MADE BILL HIS OWN HAMMER, STORMBREAKER. ODIN'S ENCHANTMENT LET BILL REVERT TO HIS HUMANOID FORM WHENEVER HE STRUCK THE HAMMER ON THE GROUND.

THOR HAS SINCE BECOME THE ALL-FATHER OF ASGARD, AND RECENTLY, DURING A DISAGREEMENT WITH BILL, THOR SHATTERED STORMBREAKER. THE TWO FRIENDS MADE AMENDS, AND THOR ASKED BILL TO BECOME ASGARD'S "MASTER OF WAR." LIVING ON ASGARD AGAIN, BILL HAS BEGUN TO REKINDLE HIS OLD ROMANCE WITH LADY SIF.

CURRENTLY, THOR IS ON EARTH FIGHTING THE KING IN BLACK AND HIS SYMBIOTE-POSSESSED ARMY. BUT THE KING IN BLACK HAS NOT FORGOTTEN ABOUT ASGARD...

ARGENT STAR

**DANIEL WARREN
JOHNSON**

WRITER/ARTIST

VC's **JOE SABINO**
WITH **DANIEL WARREN
JOHNSON**

LETTERERS

**MIKE
SPICER**

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INTRODUCTION

It has been nearly a decade since I last wrote something for Daniel Warren Johnson.

Daniel and I started our careers in comics at the exact same time in a little book that I wrote and he drew called *The Ghost Fleet*. It was an absolutely insane book about truckers and demons and hell and rage and friendship and love and...well, come to think of it, I don't think either of us has really stopped writing about those things since.

But now...Daniel and I have found ourselves in new, strange, wonderful lands, far from the fields we know. If we weren't before, Daniel and I are warbound now. Back-to-back, brothers of Asgard, facing down the fires of Muspelheim, Hel damned and hammers raised.

(Damn, that's cool.)

When editor Wil Moss and I started breaking down the big beats that would begin to shape my run on THOR, I knew that Beta Ray Bill would play a large role. I absolutely **adore** that character. Which of course means that I would have to be cruel to him.

Sorry. Those are the rules.

I knew he would lose his hammer. I knew that he would be brought low before eventually taking his place as Asgard's Master of War. The breaking of Stormbreaker was initially there to show how desperate Thor had become in his trials as Asgard's king — his crown would weigh so heavy that it would turn him away from even his closest of allies.

That, in short...he would find himself on a path to becoming Odin. To being alone. And bitter.

But perhaps more importantly than that....it allowed us an excuse to try something new. Without Stormbreaker...well, Bill would need

something new and ferocious to wield, right? Something fearsome. Something enormous and utterly insane. What the Hel could we put in Beta Ray Bill's hands that would rival the **famed Stormbreaker?!**

Well. I had no clue. BUT....

Enter **Daniel Warren Johnson**. If you know Daniel's work (and if not, you're about to), you know he has this incredible LOUD QUIET LOUD to his work that very few people in this industry can thread like he can. It's a delicate balance of over-the-top action set pieces and, almost seamlessly nestled within and around them, the quietest, most gentle of character moments. Doom Metal sludging through an opera house. A valentine wrapped in napalm.

Beautiful. Brutal. Brilliant.

THAT is a Daniel Warren Johnson book. And no one does it better. And this one here is no different.

You guys, seriously. This book opens with a symbiote-covered dragon punching a talking spaceship out of the air and THEN things get crazy.

It's my favorite Beta Ray Bill story that has ever been told. Promise.

But listen...enough of me. There's a reason I haven't written anything for Daniel in ten years. I just get in the way.

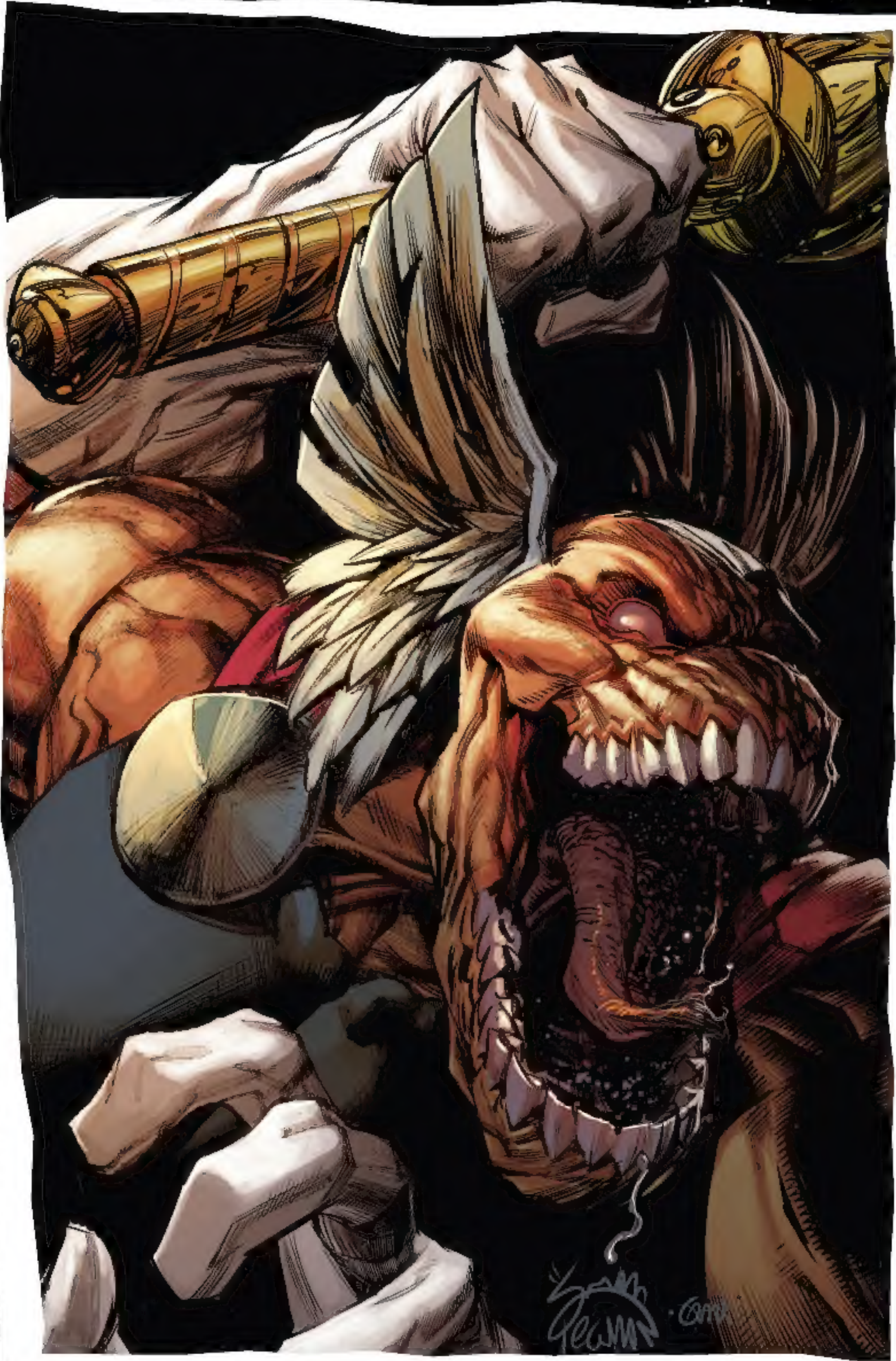
And, as honored as I am to be asked to write this, I cannot FATHOM why you are wasting time reading this introduction.

Because honestly?

Daniel doesn't need one.

Just turn the page already.

—Donny Cates



#1 VARIANT BY **RYAN STEGMAN**
& **FRANK MARTIN**



#1 STORMBREAKER VARIANT BY **IBAN COELLO**
& **JESUS ABURTOV**



#1 VARIANT BY **WALTER SIMONSON**
& **LAURA MARTIN**



#1 HEADSHOT VARIANT BY **TODD NAUCK**
& **RACHELLE ROSENBERG**



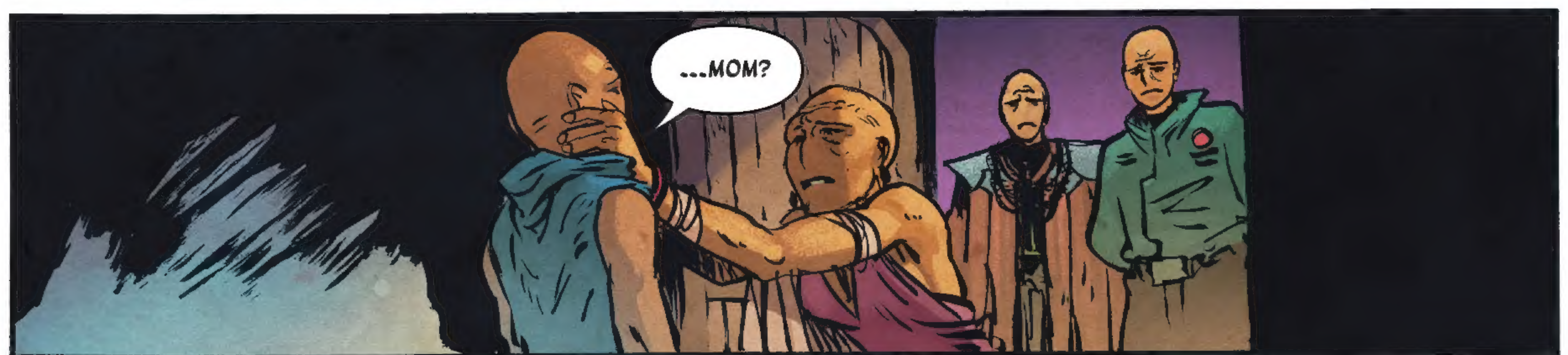
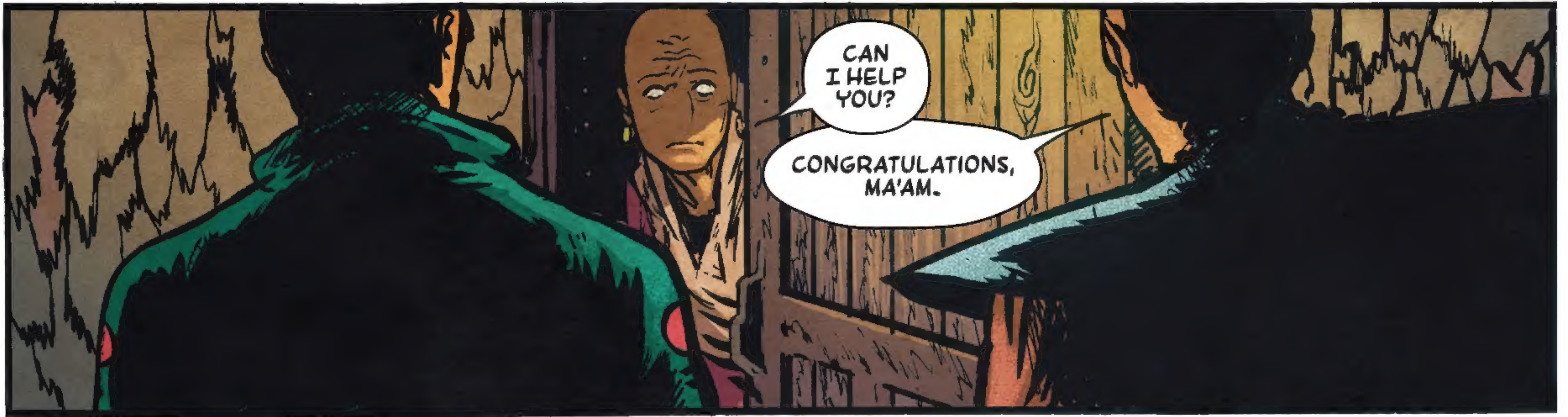
THEN

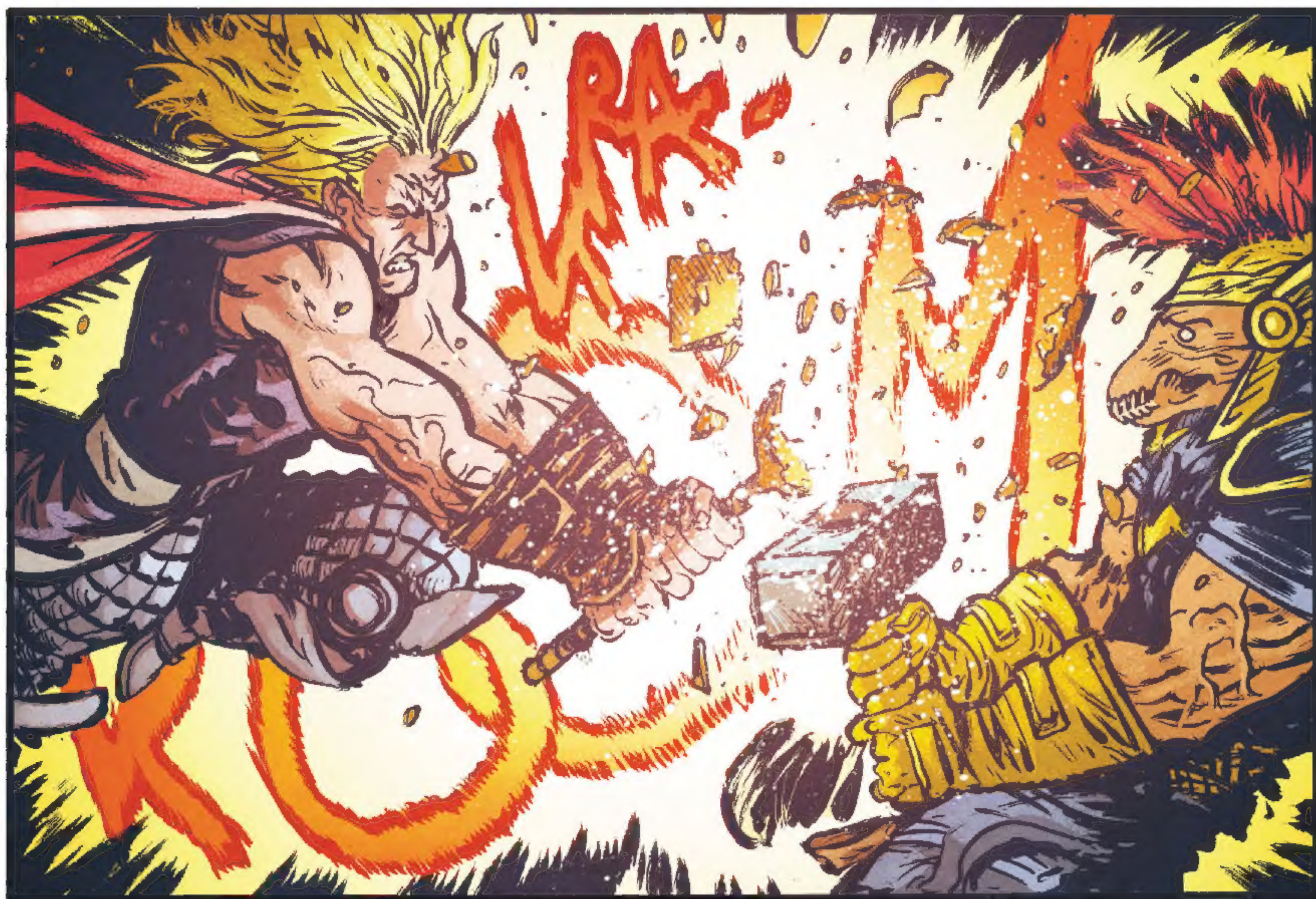
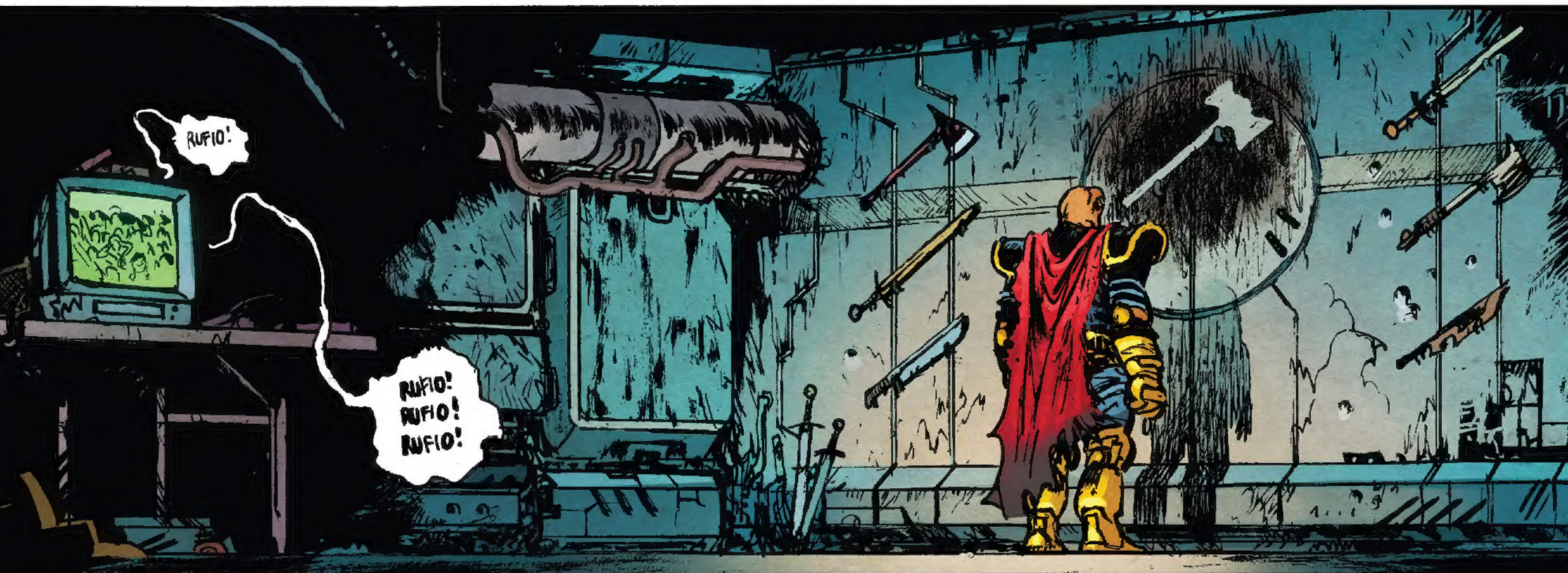
WELL?
WHAT DO YOU
SEE?



WHAT IS
COMING?

FIRE.









NOOOAH!



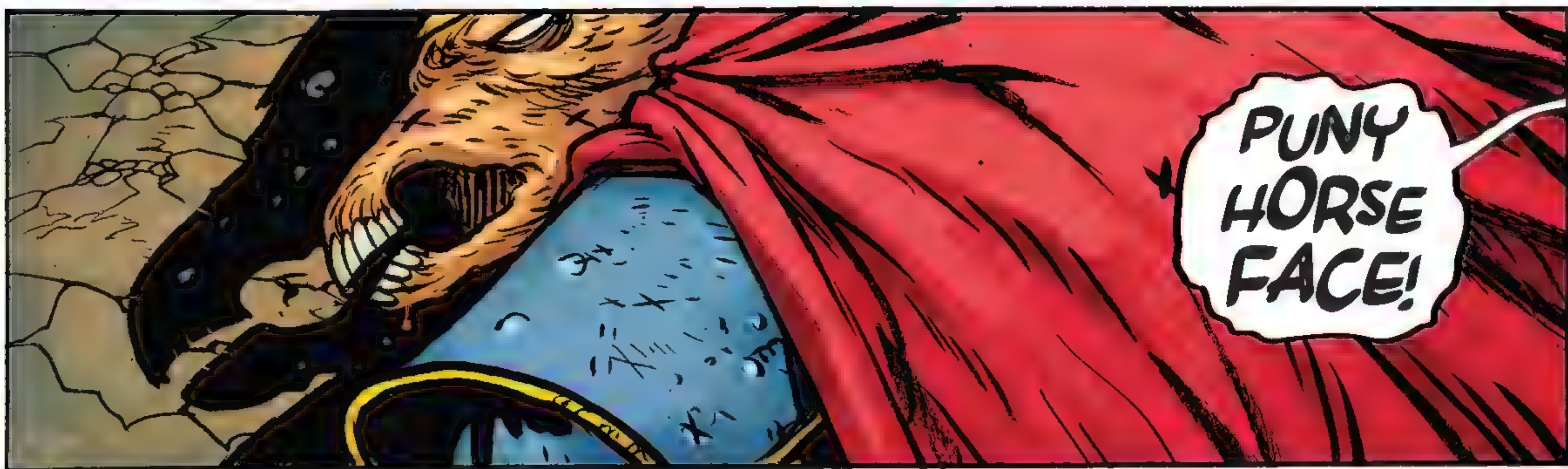
THE KING
IN BLACK'S GREAT
BEAST IS FINALLY
UPON US! HE IS JUST
BEYOND THE GATES
OF OUR BEAUTIFUL
HOME!



BUT
WE HAVE
PLANNED FOR
THIS DAY!



WE ARE
PREPARED! AND
TOGETHER, WITH OUR
MIGHT COMBINED,
WE WILL CRUSH
THIS--





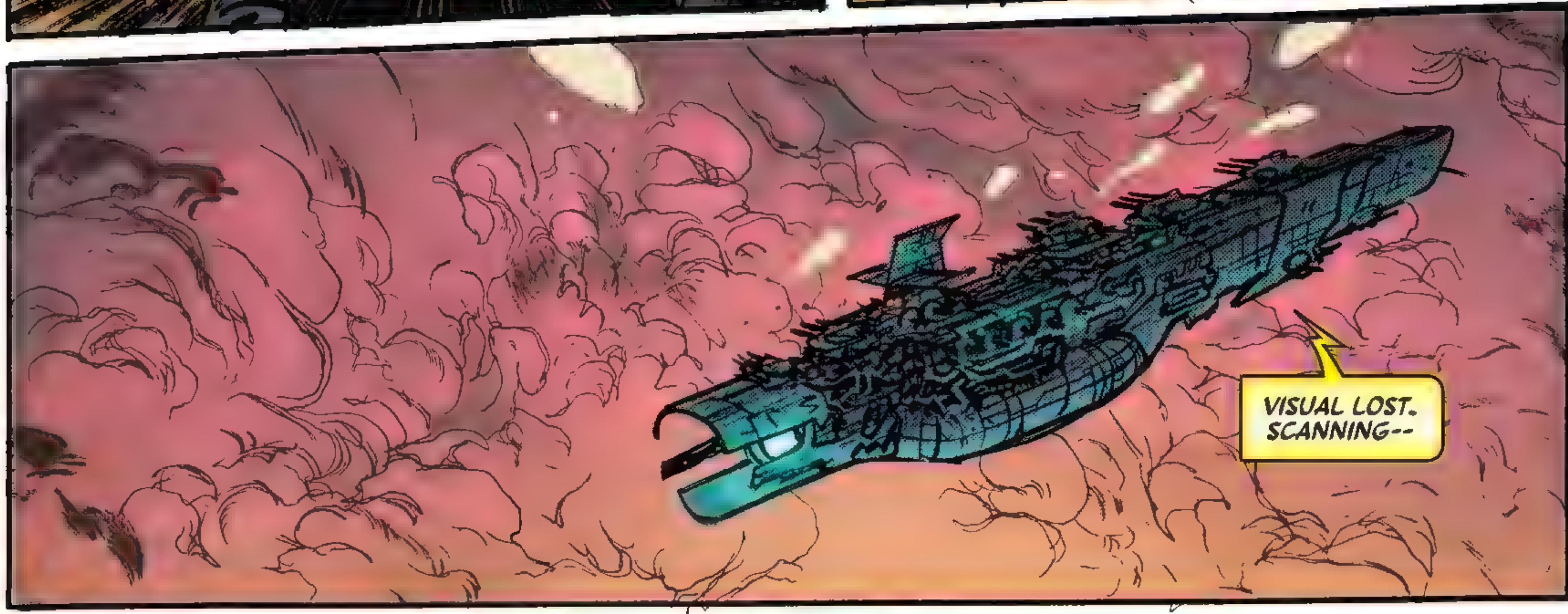
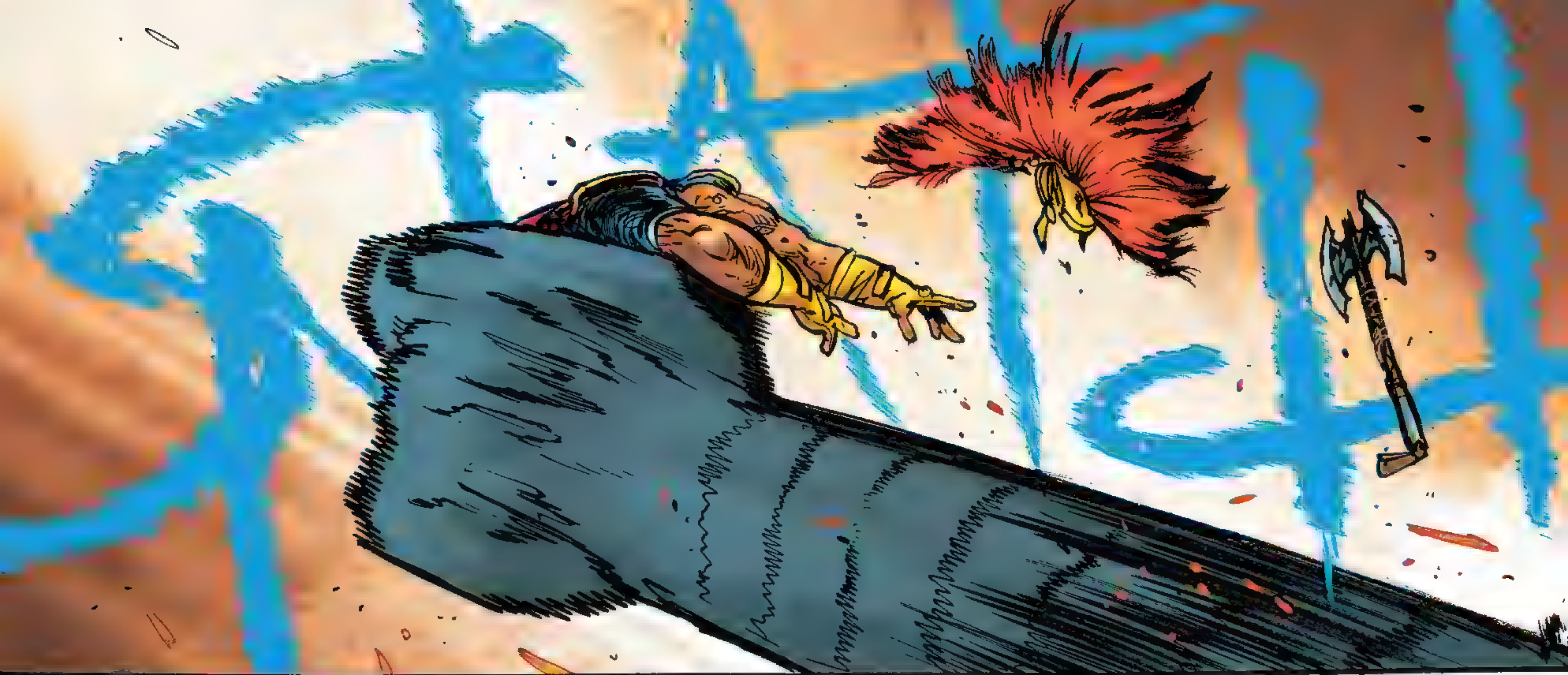
WHEEL
BEFORE
THE MIGHT OF
FOOM!



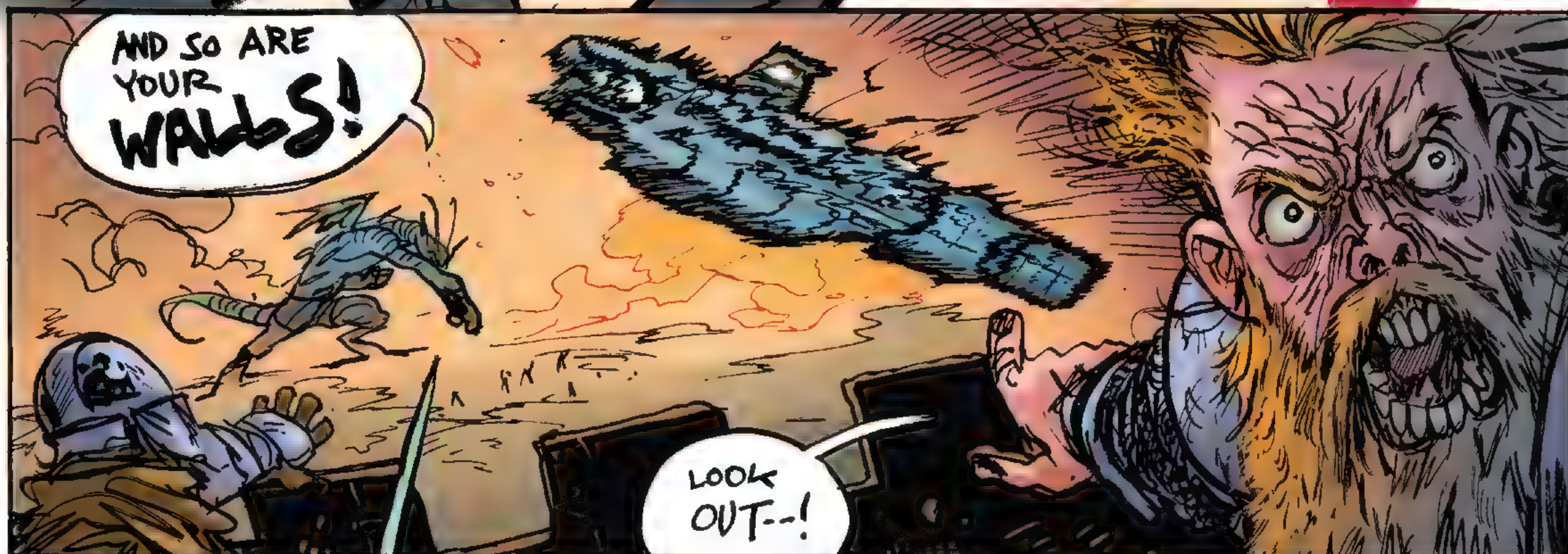
I AM HERE,
BETA RAY.

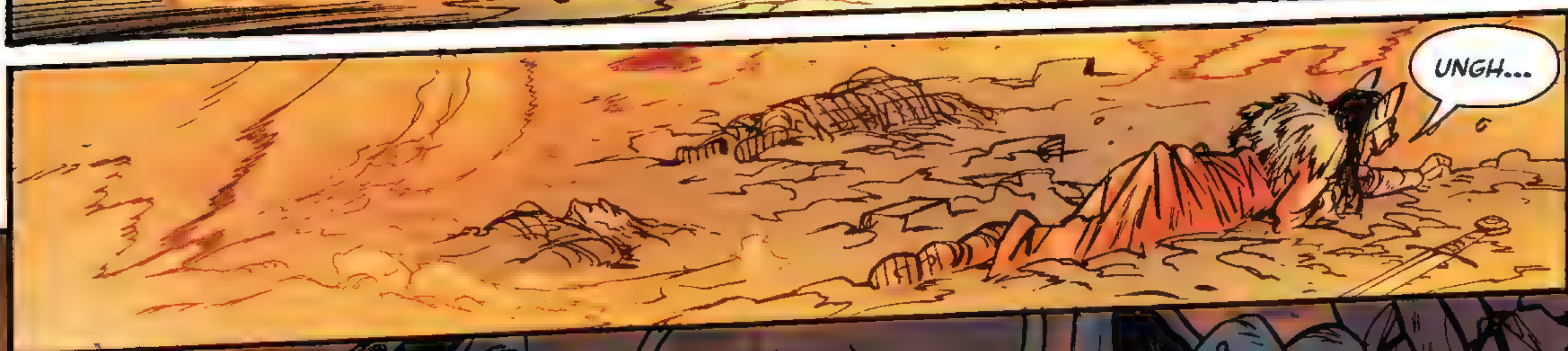
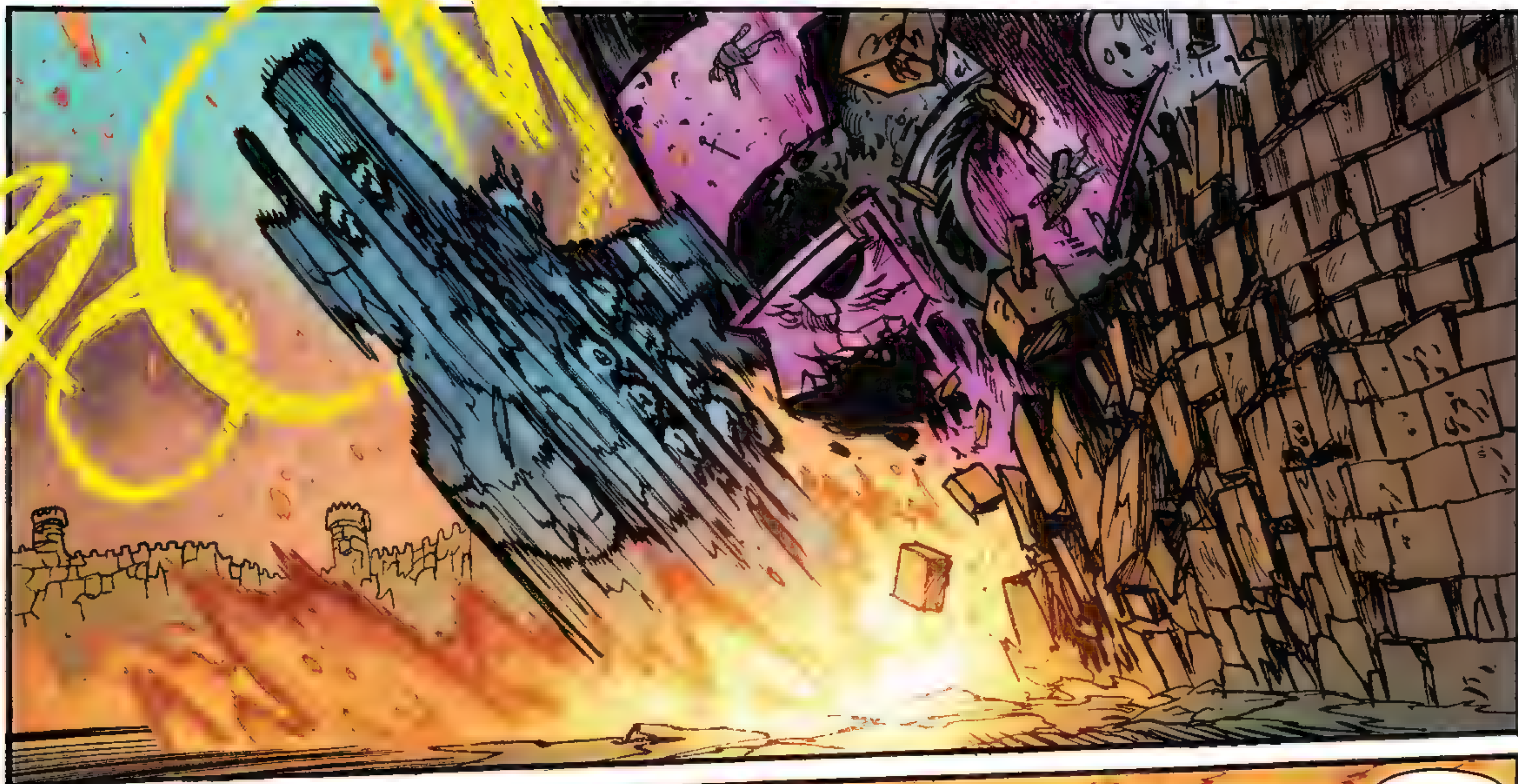
GAUSS CANNONS
ENGAGED. COMMENCING
ASSAULT.

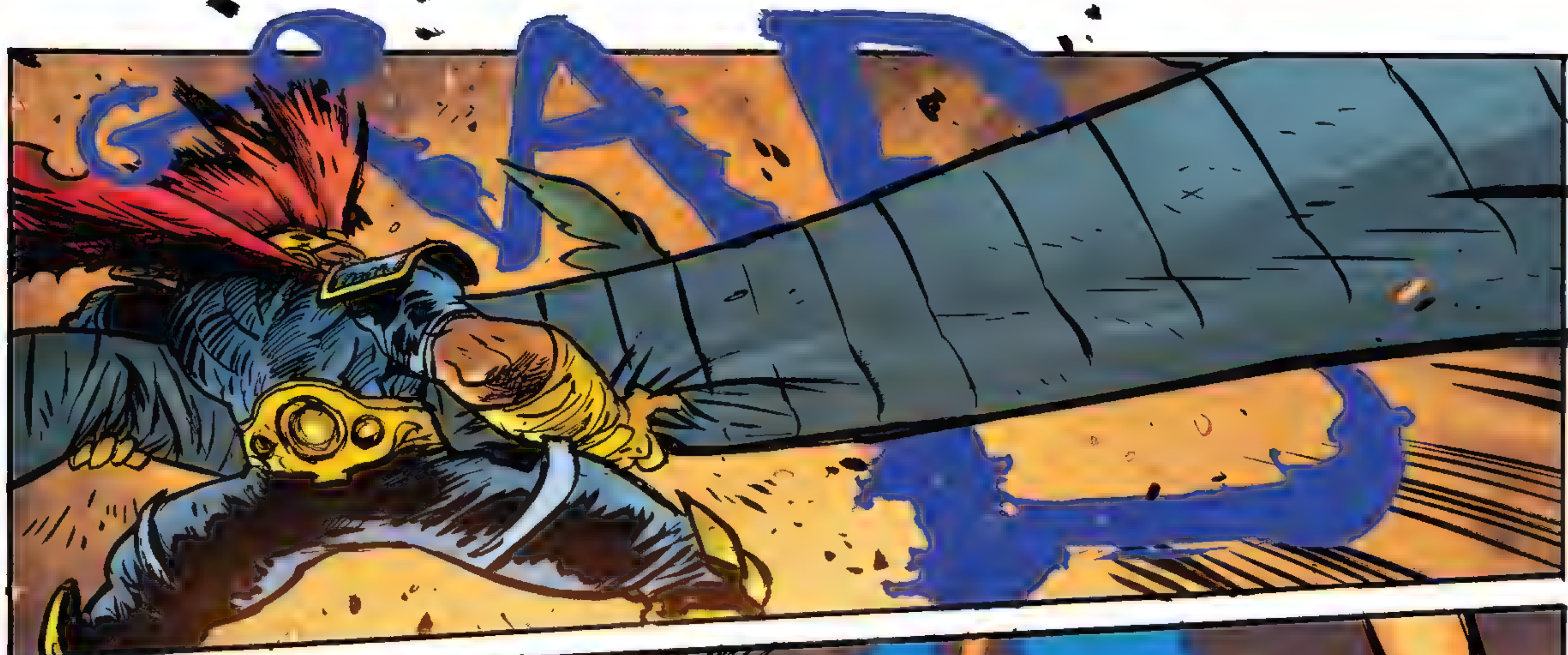


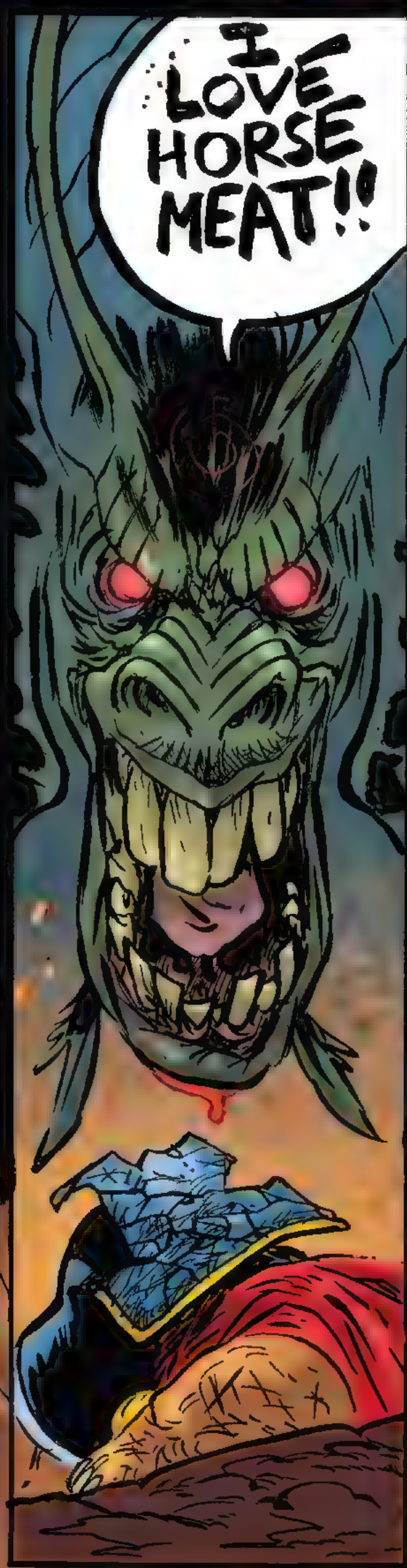
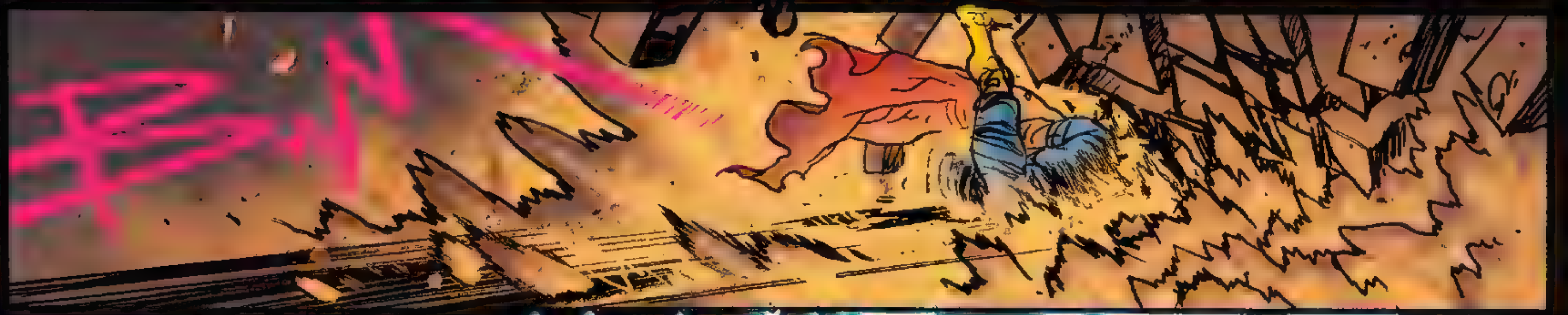


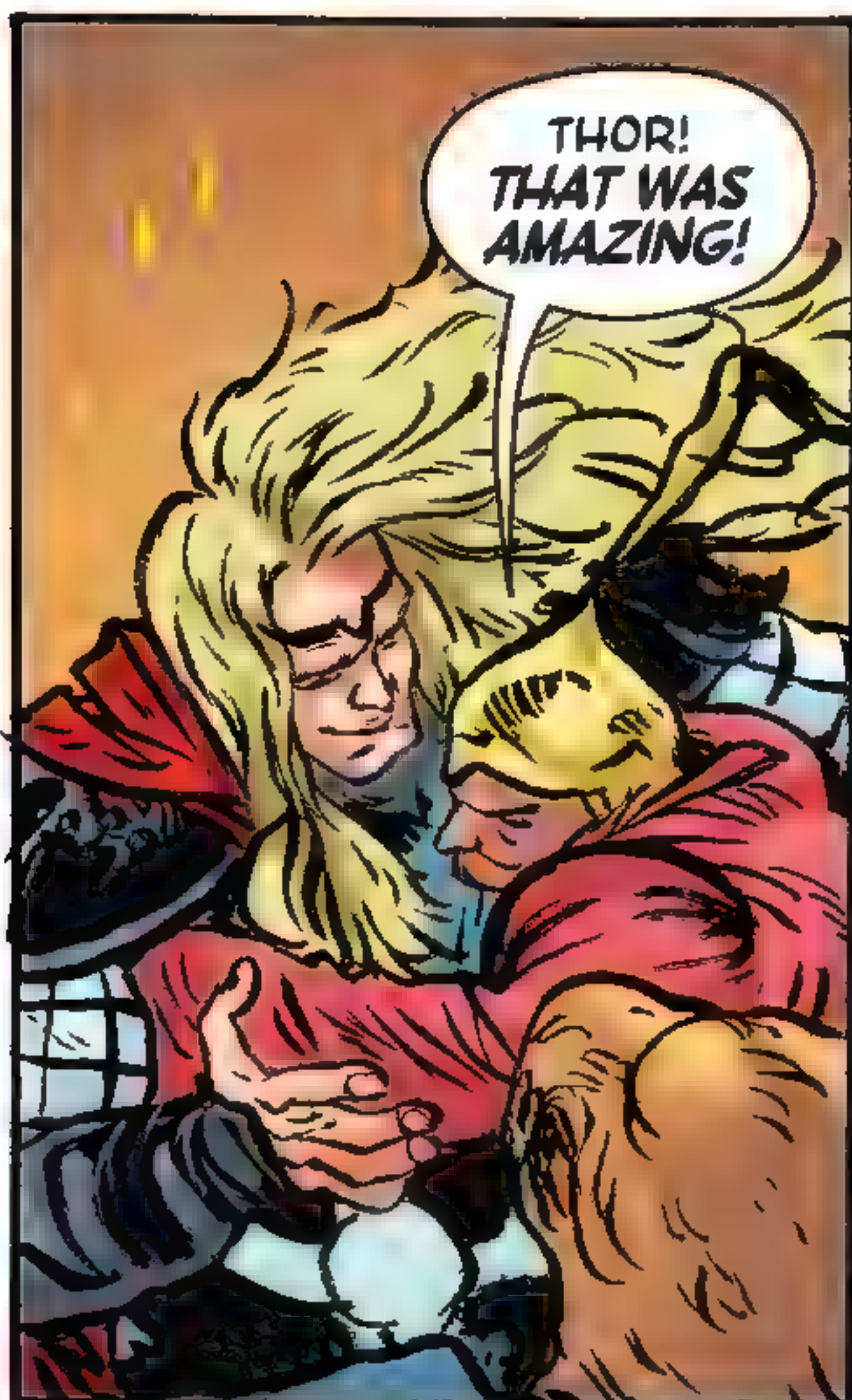
VISUAL LOST.
SCANNING--

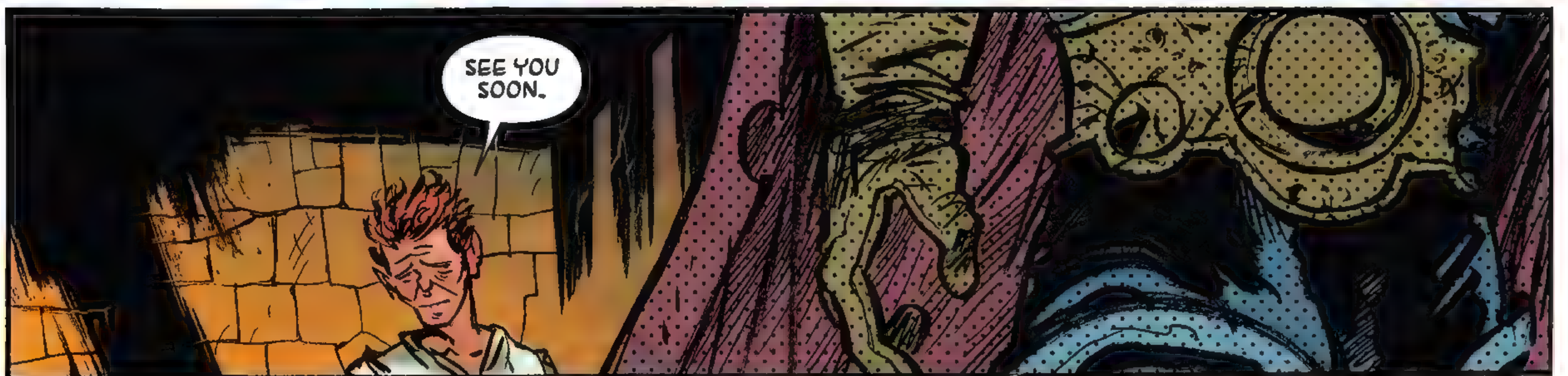
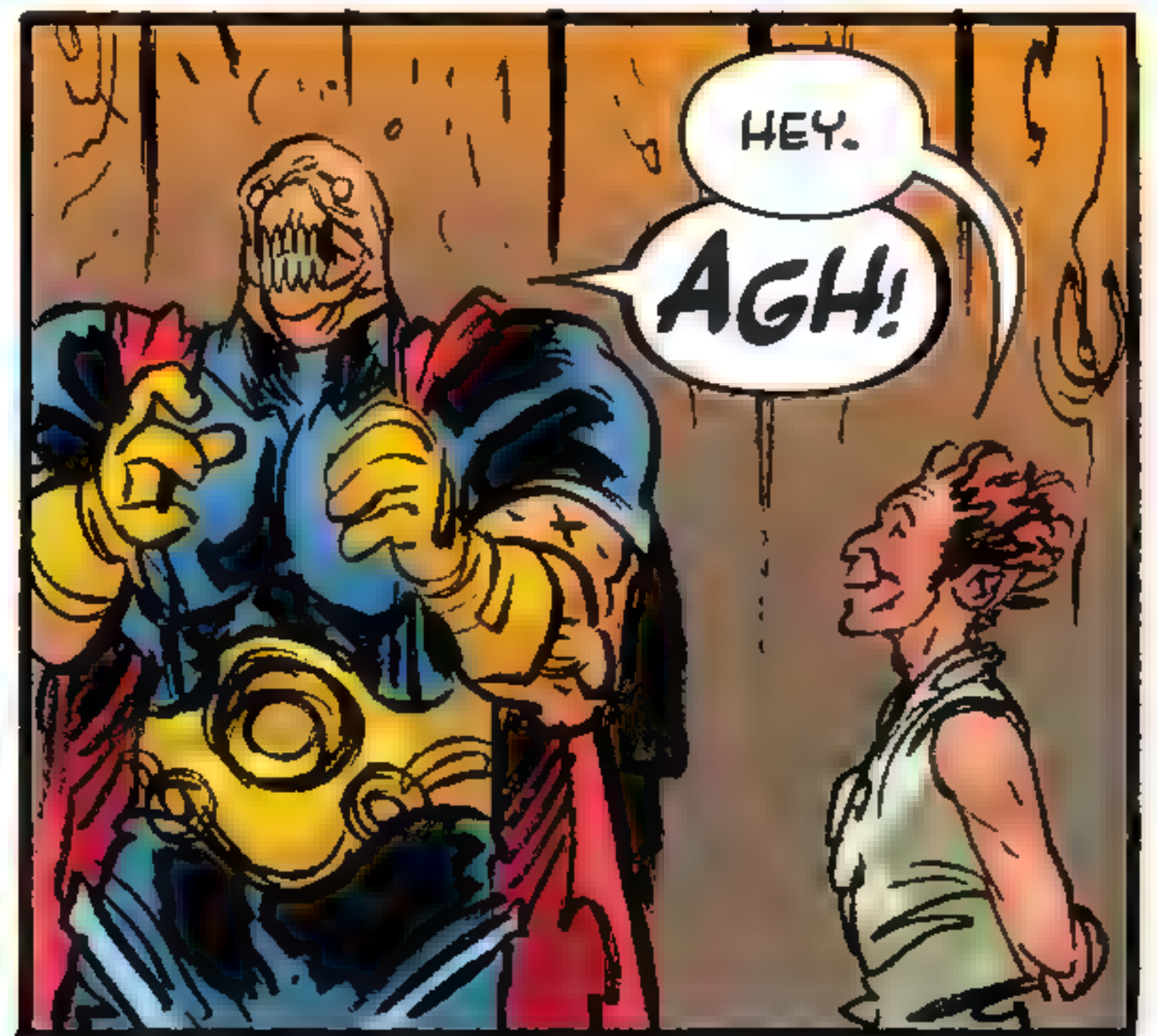
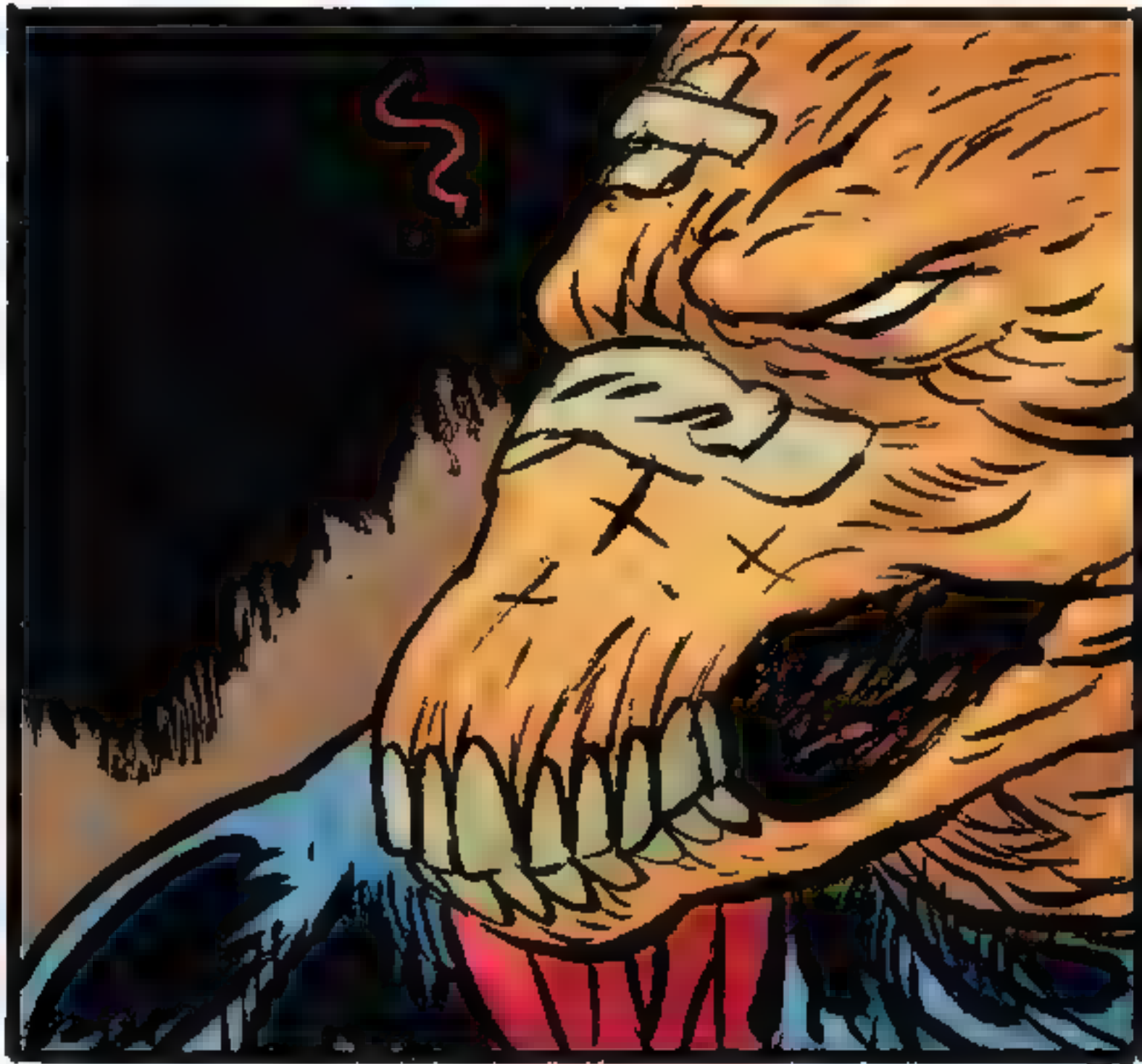
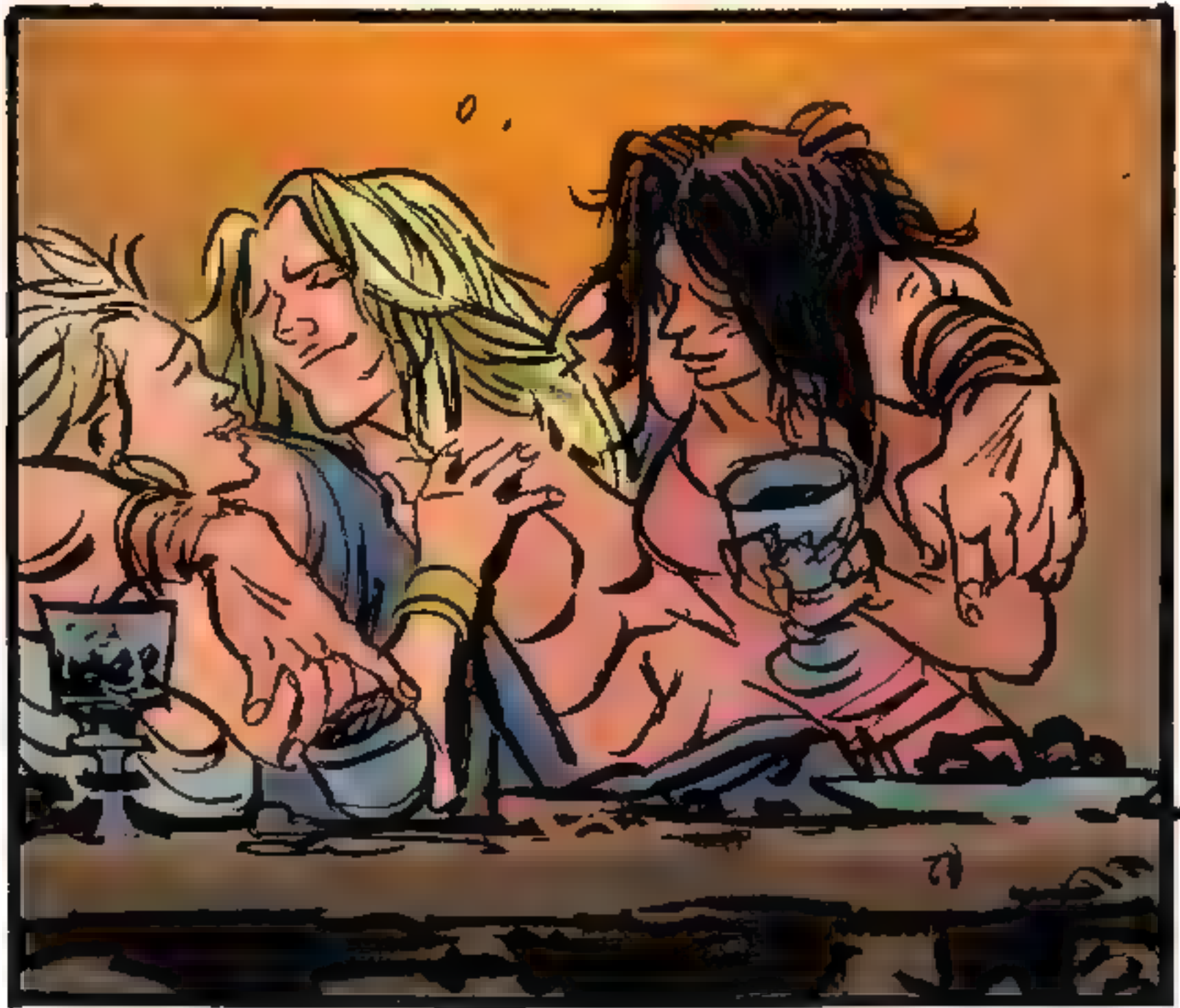












BILL!

ARE
YOU LEAVING
THE PARTY
ALREADY?

WELL,
I--

LOOKS
LIKE YOU OWE
ME TWO DRINKS
NOW.





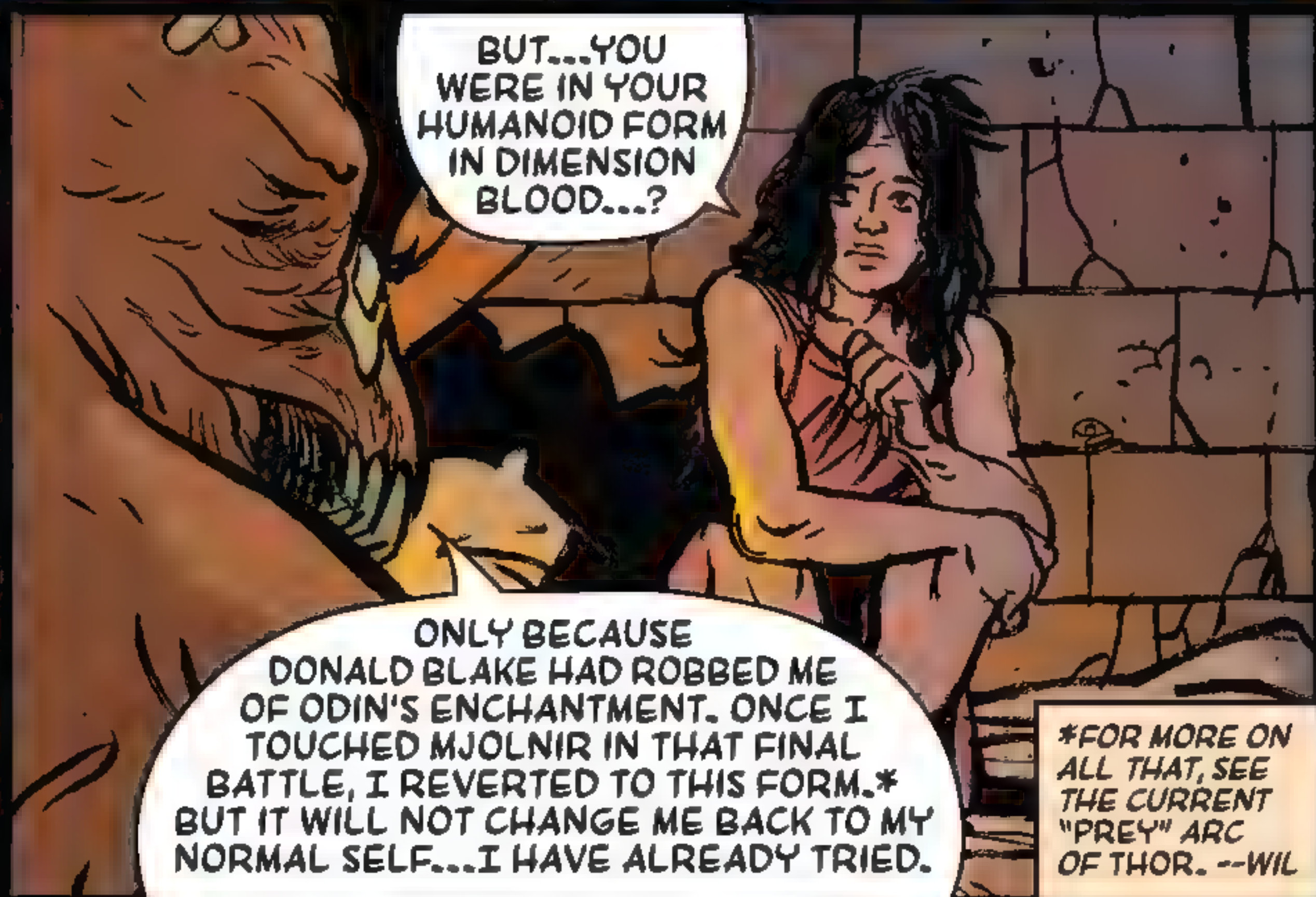
UH--WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

YOUR HUMANOID FORM.



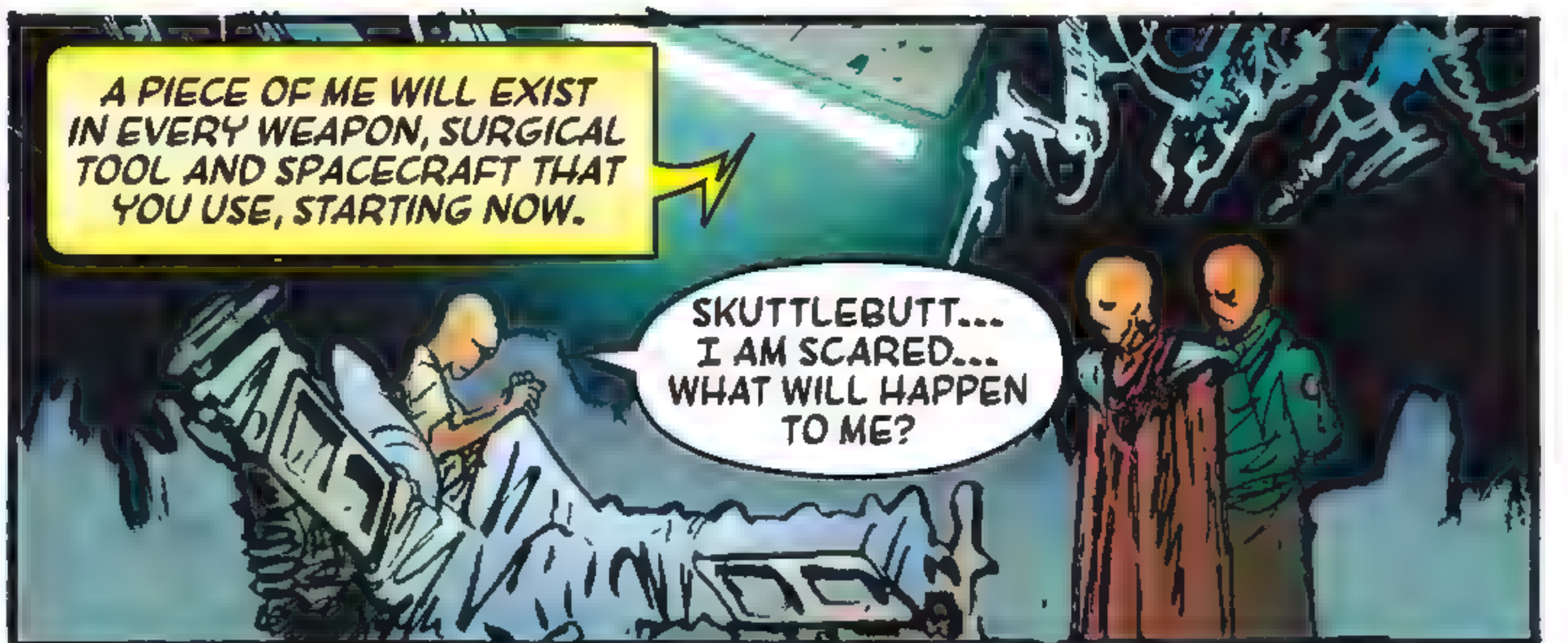
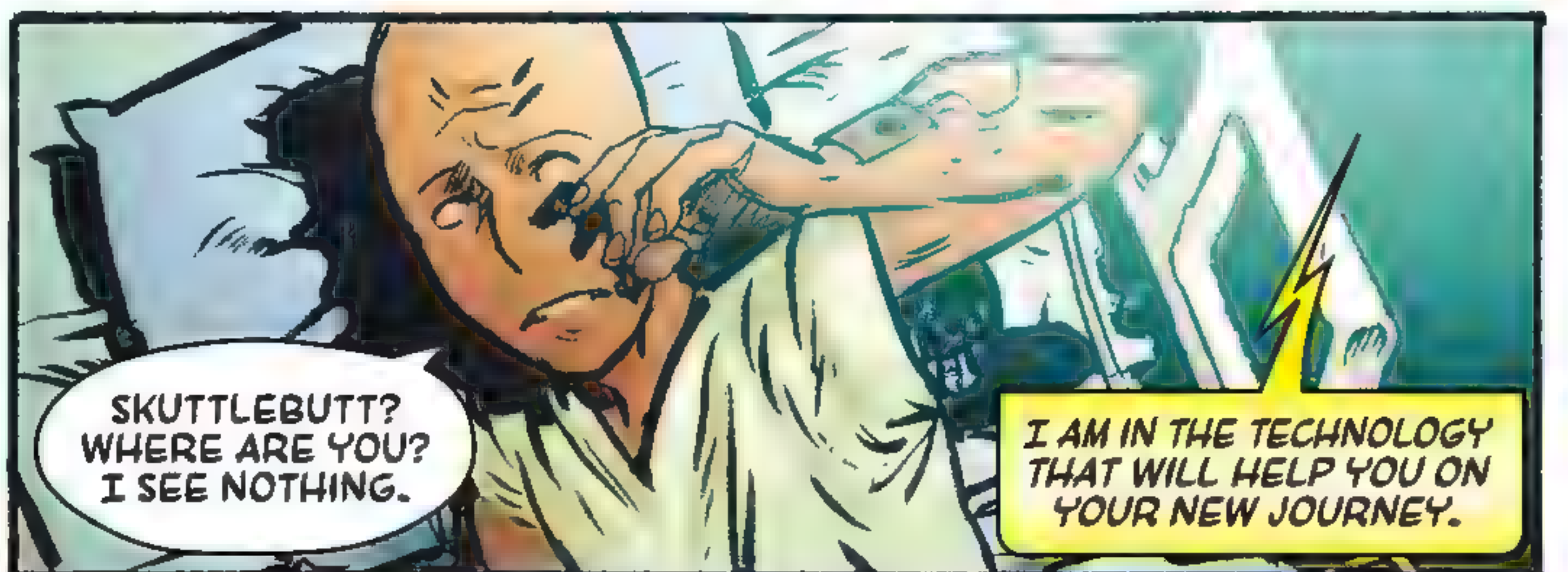
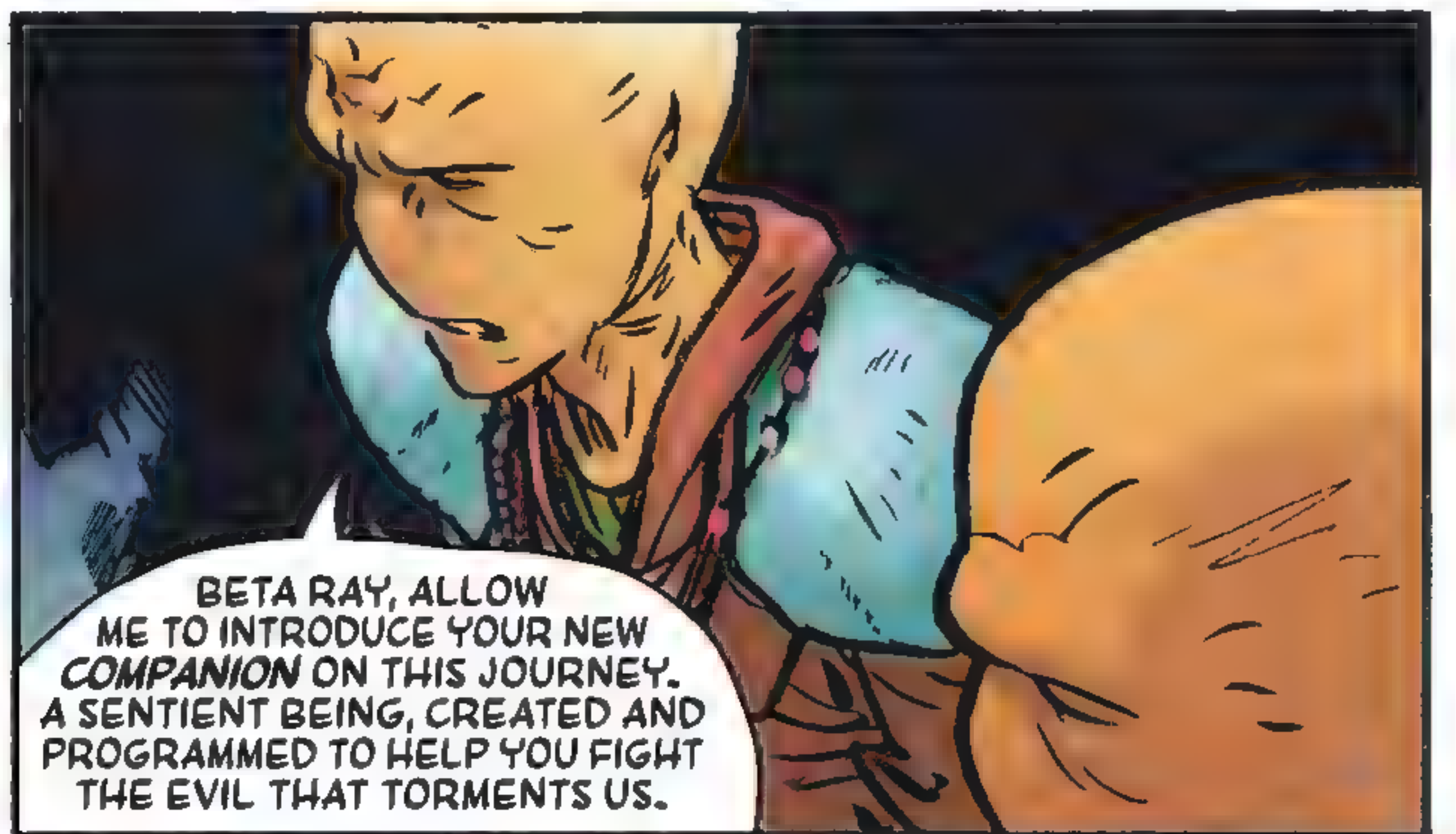
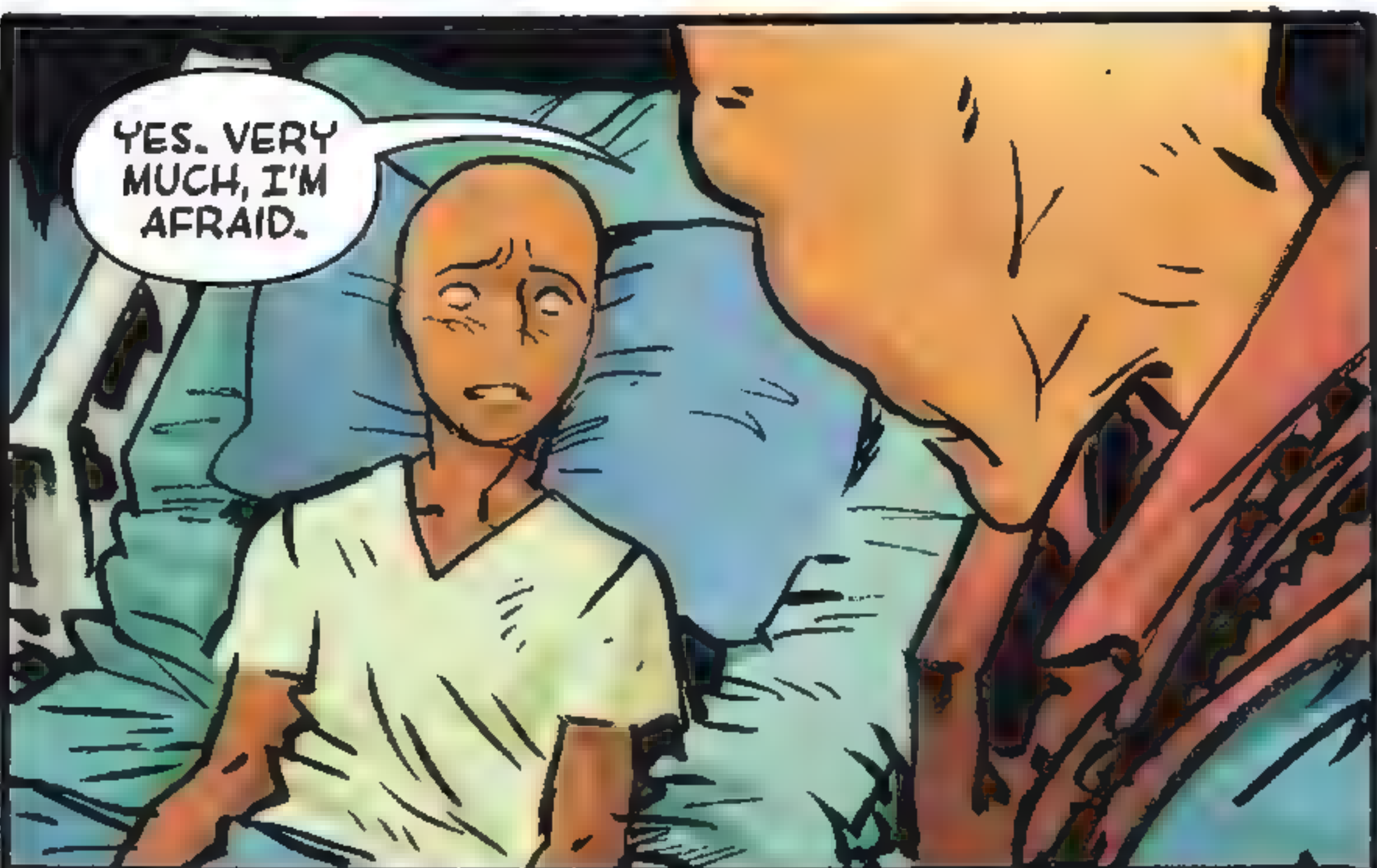
DON'T YOU CHANGE BACK...

...AT NIGHT?



*FOR MORE ON ALL THAT, SEE THE CURRENT "PREY" ARC OF THOR. --WIL





"I WILL ALWAYS
BE HERE."

SKUTTLEBUTT.

YES,
BETA RAY.

PREP
THE ENGINES.
WE ARE
LEAVING.

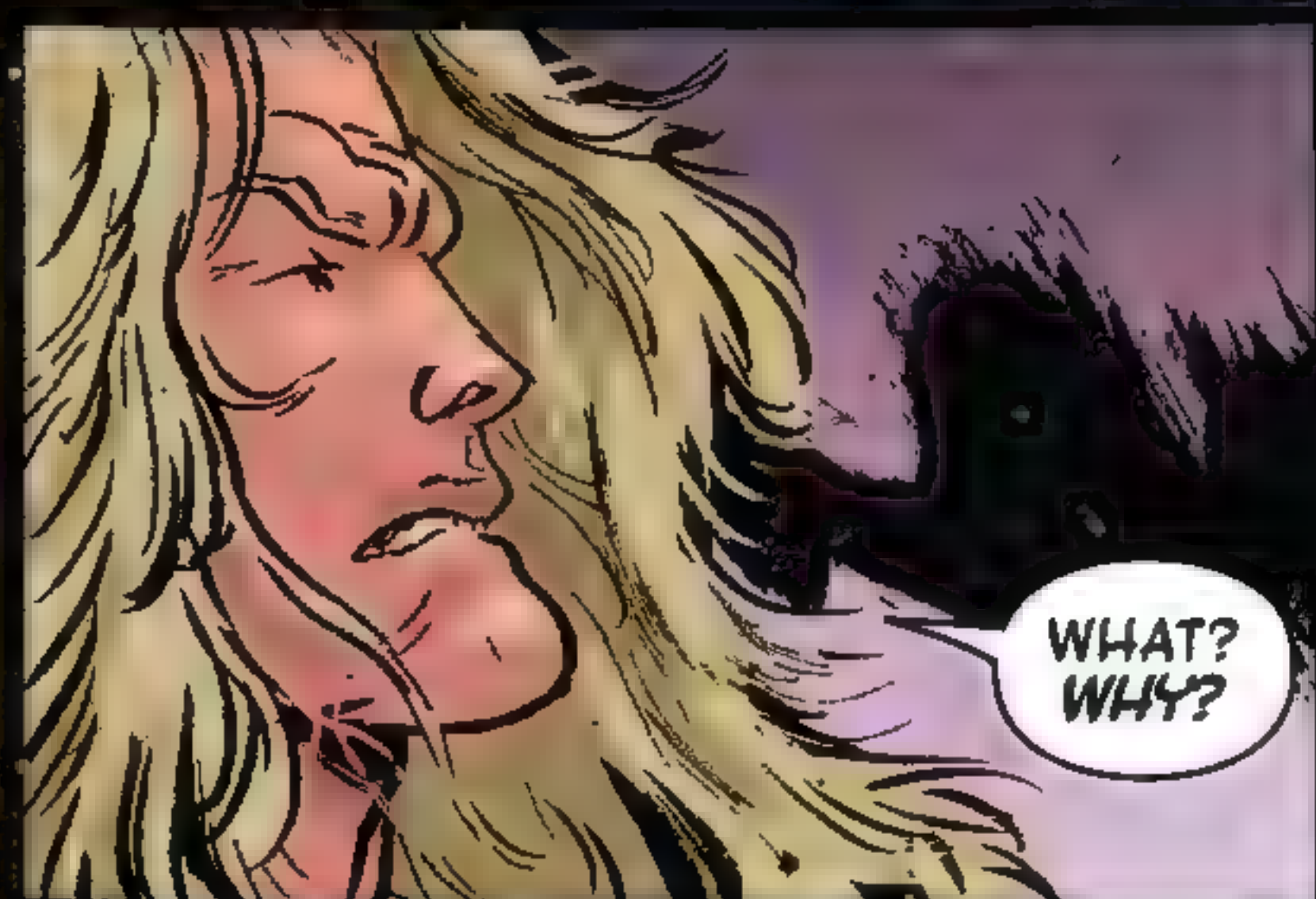




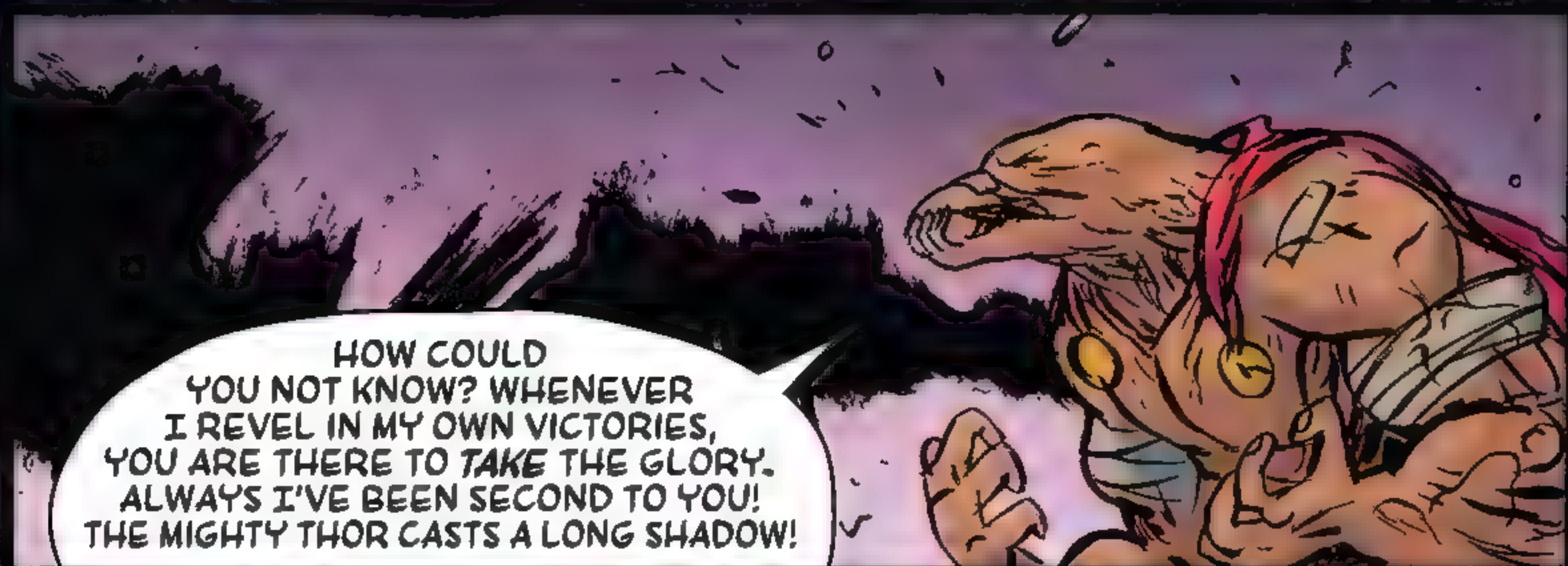
BILL?

WHERE
ARE YOU
GOING?

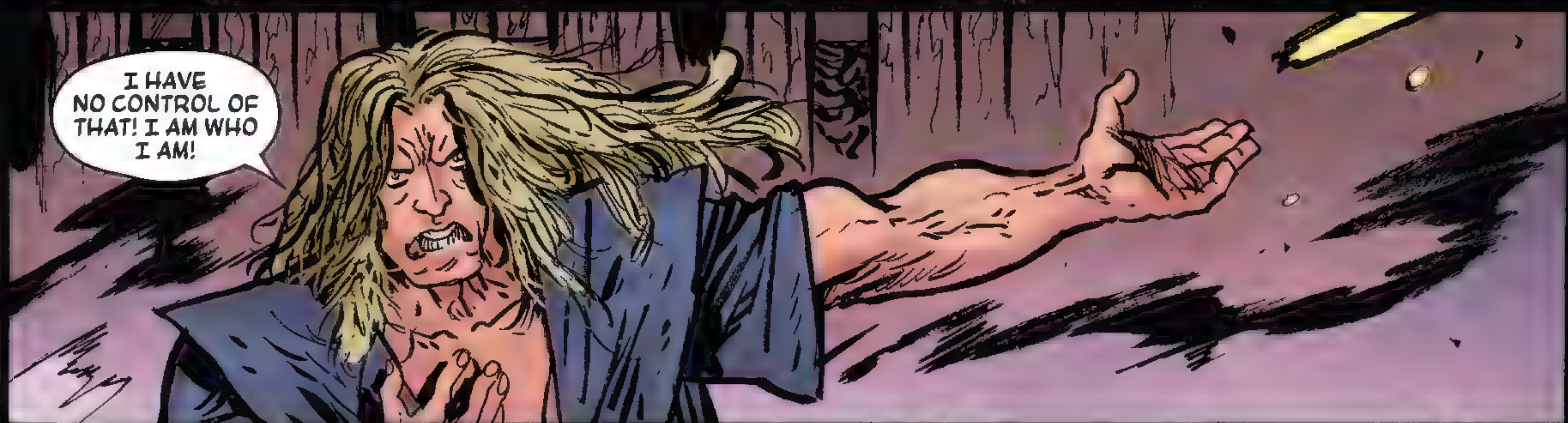
AWAY
FROM HERE.
FAR AWAY.



WHAT?
WHY?



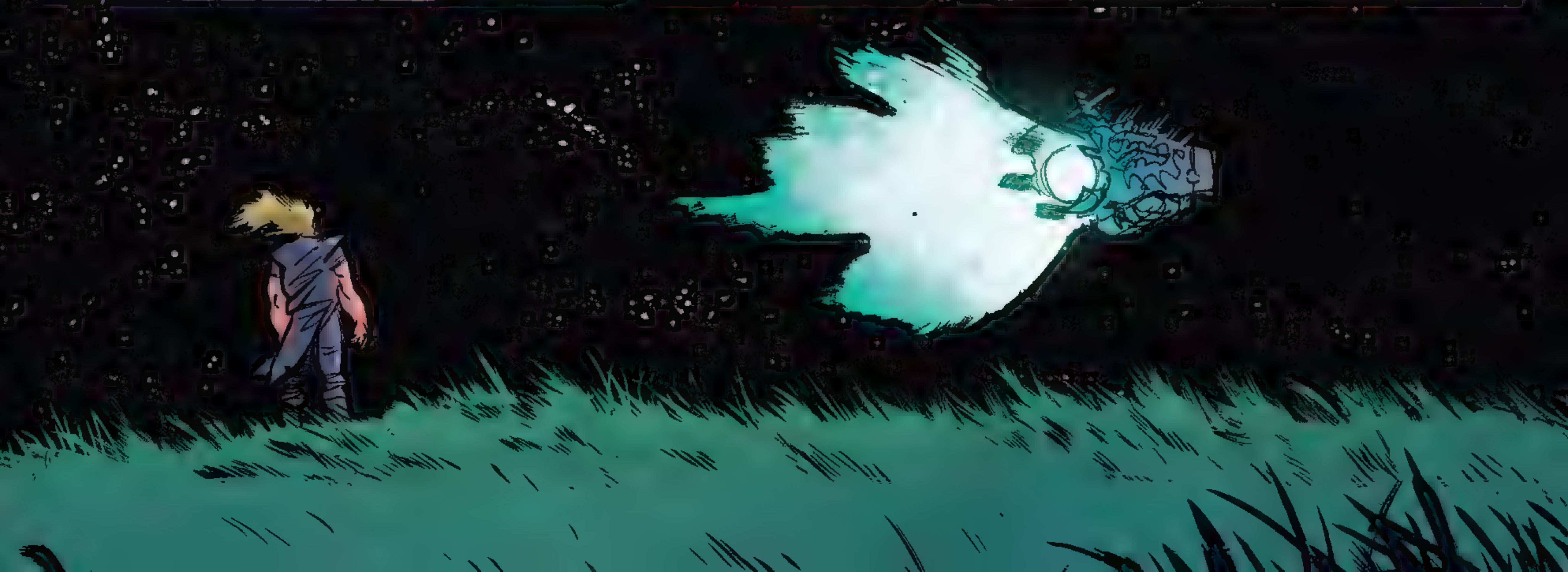
HOW COULD
YOU NOT KNOW? WHENEVER
I REVEL IN MY OWN VICTORIES,
YOU ARE THERE TO TAKE THE GLORY.
ALWAYS I'VE BEEN SECOND TO YOU!
THE MIGHTY THOR CASTS A LONG SHADOW!



I HAVE
NO CONTROL OF
THAT! I AM WHO
I AM!



BUT IT WAS
YOU THAT BROKE
MY HAMMER! YOU
TOOK AWAY ODIN'S
GREATEST GIFT
TO ME!



EAT YOUR
HEART OUT, YOU
CRINKLED, WRINKLED
FARTBAG!

YOU'RE A
SLUG EATING
WORM!

BANGARANG,
RUFIO!

BANGARANG,
RUFIO!



#1 VARIANT BY
CHASE CONLEY



#2 VARIANT BY
**PAUL POPE &
MIKE SPICER**



#3 VARIANT BY
MIKE DEL MUNDO



#4 VARIANT BY **DECLAN SHALVEY**

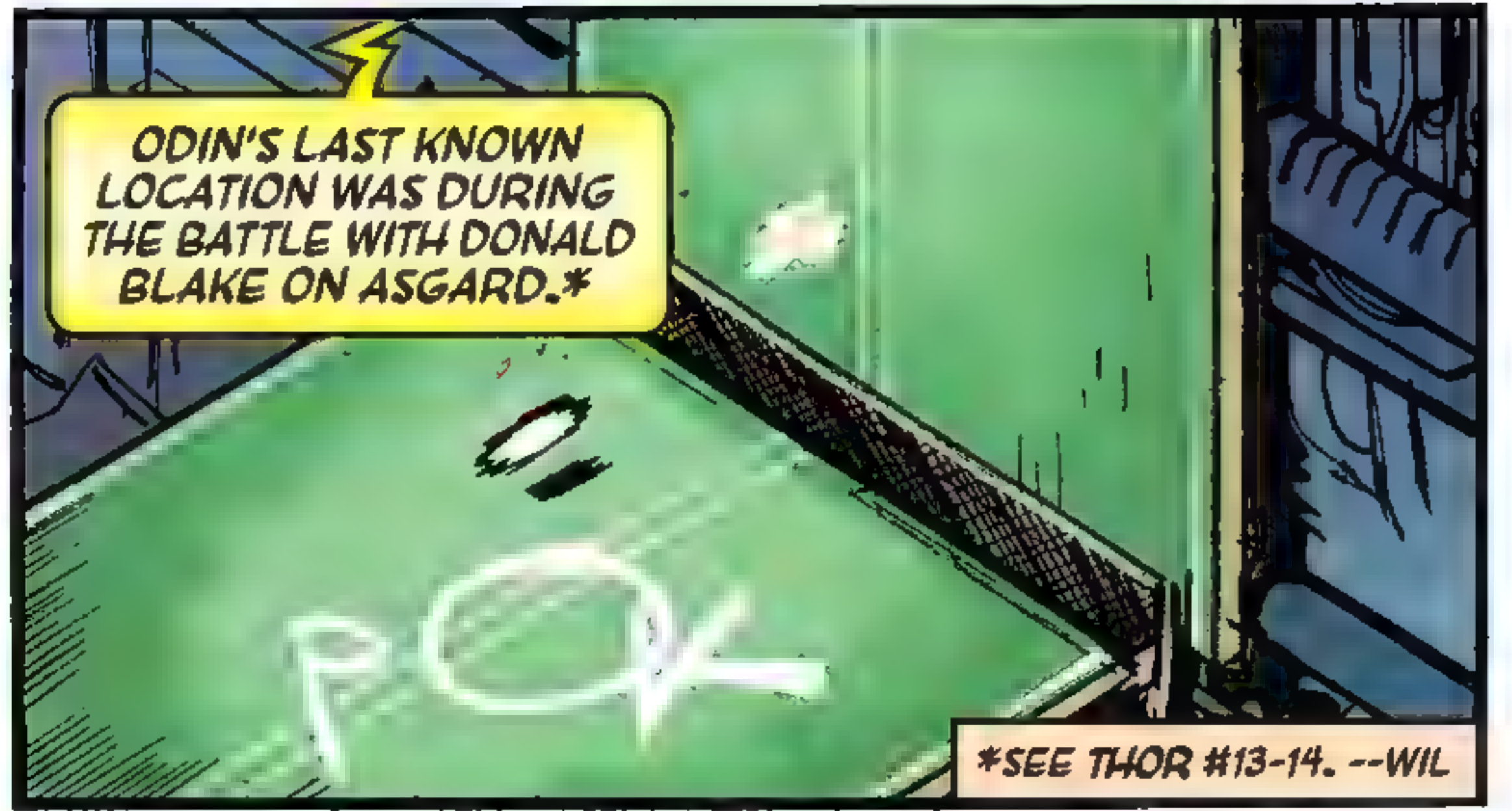


#5 VARIANT BY **NICK DRAGOTTA & RICO RENZI**





SO WE
HAVE NO IDEA
WHERE HE'S
GONE?

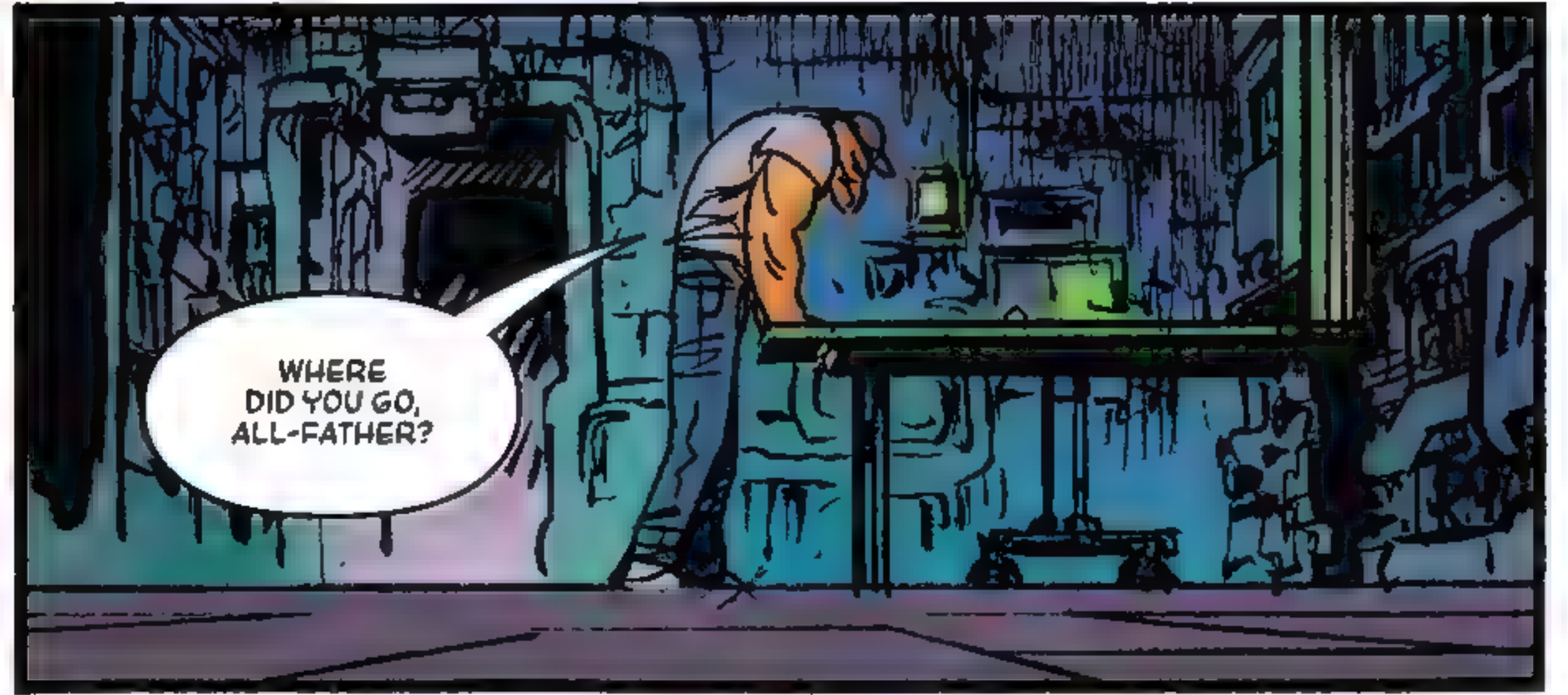
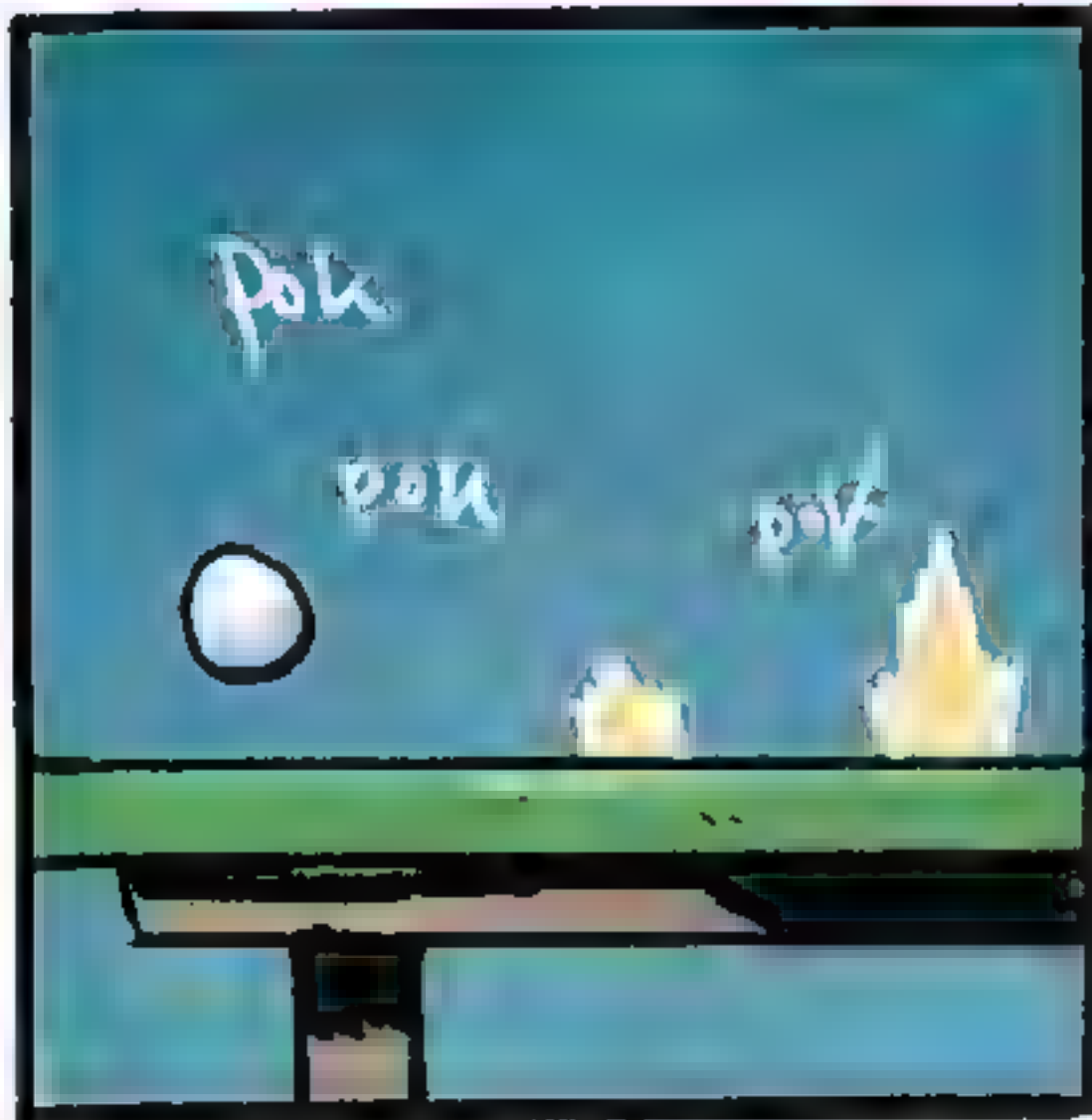


ODIN'S LAST KNOWN
LOCATION WAS DURING
THE BATTLE WITH DONALD
BLAKE ON ASGARD.*

*SEE THOR #13-14. --WIL



FROM THERE, HE
DISAPPEARED, WITH
NO SIGHTINGS SINCE.

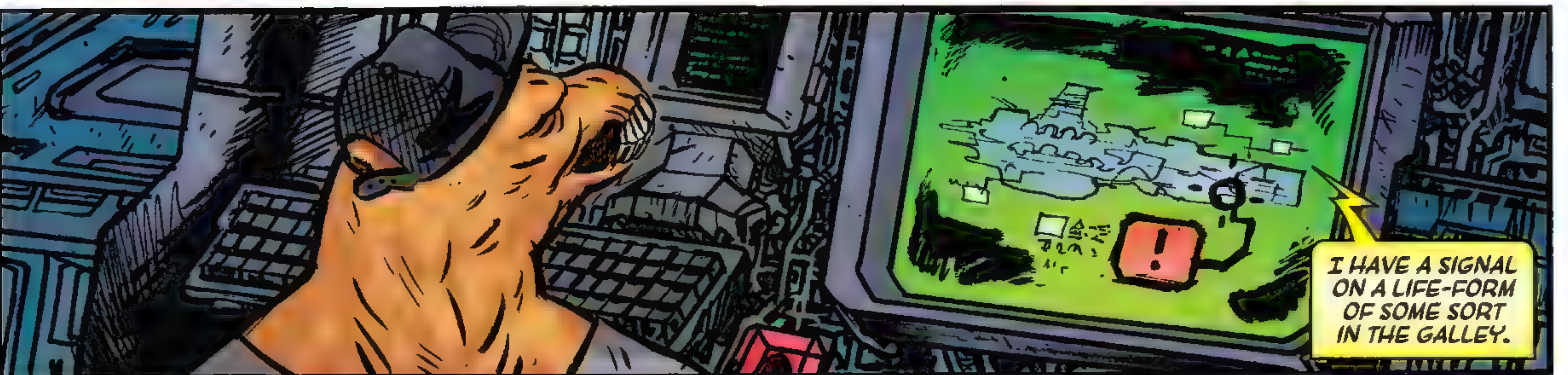


WHERE
DID YOU GO,
ALL-FATHER?

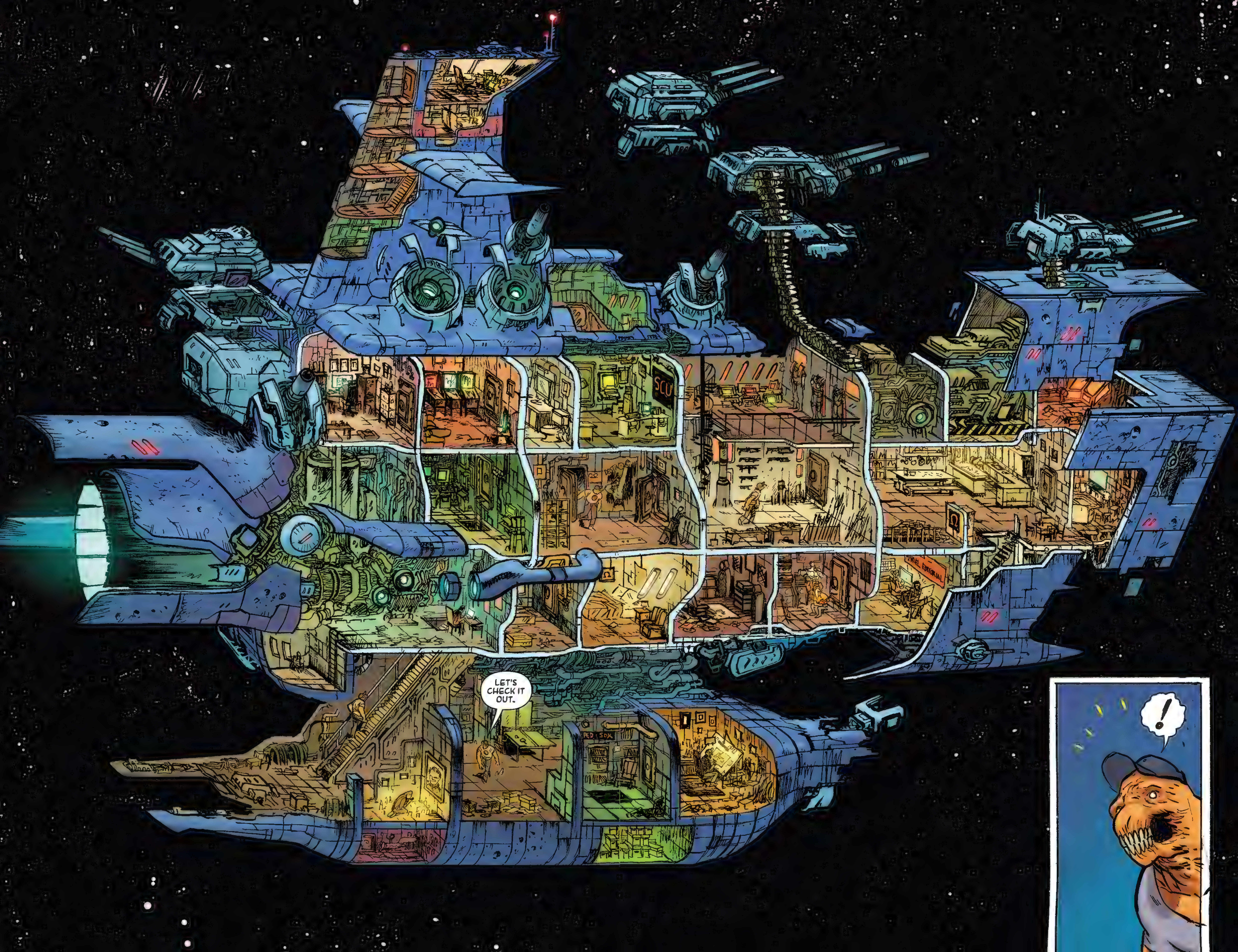


TALK
TO ME,
SKUTT.

SOMETHING IS ON
BOARD. COMMENCING
INTERIOR SCAN.

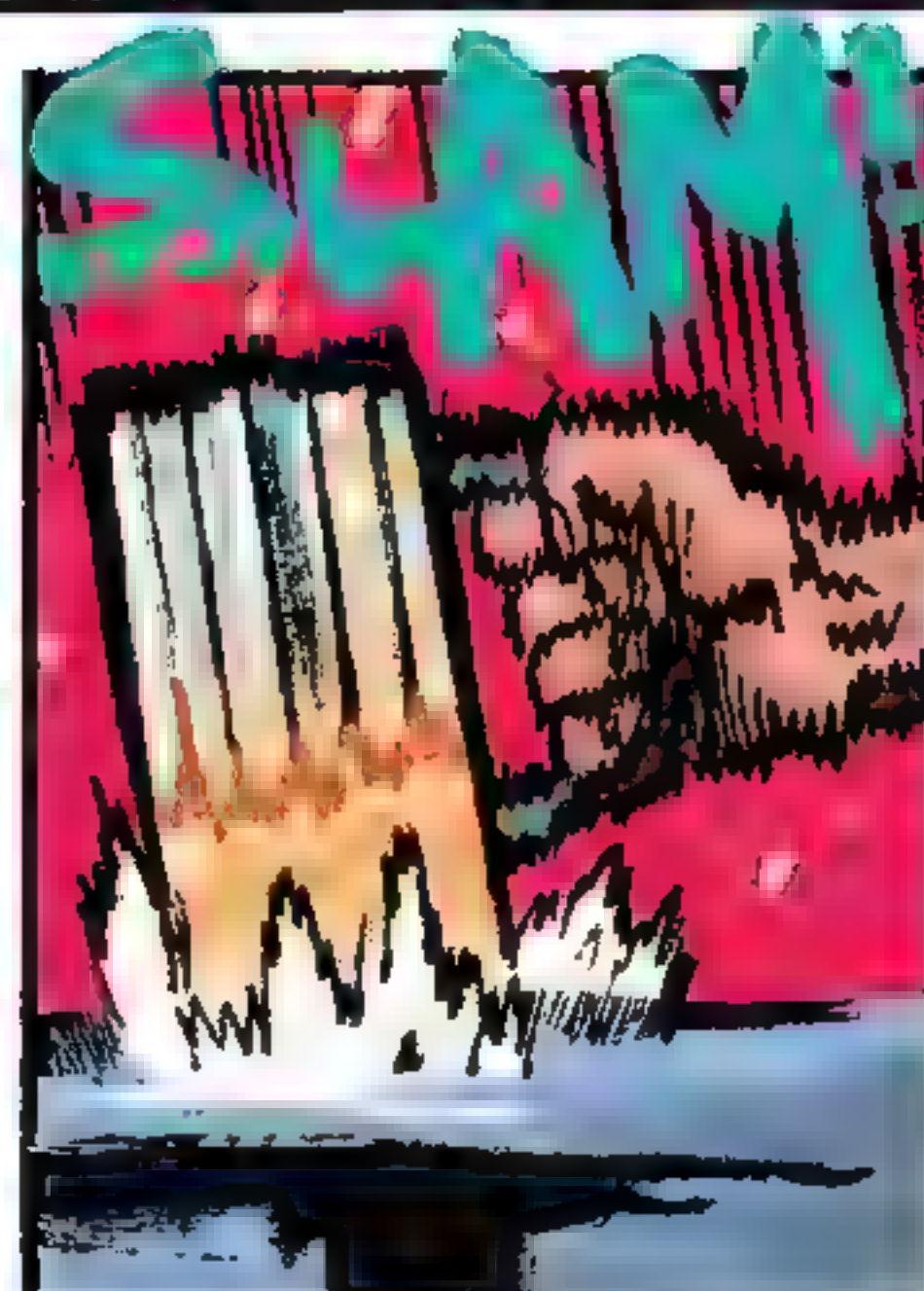
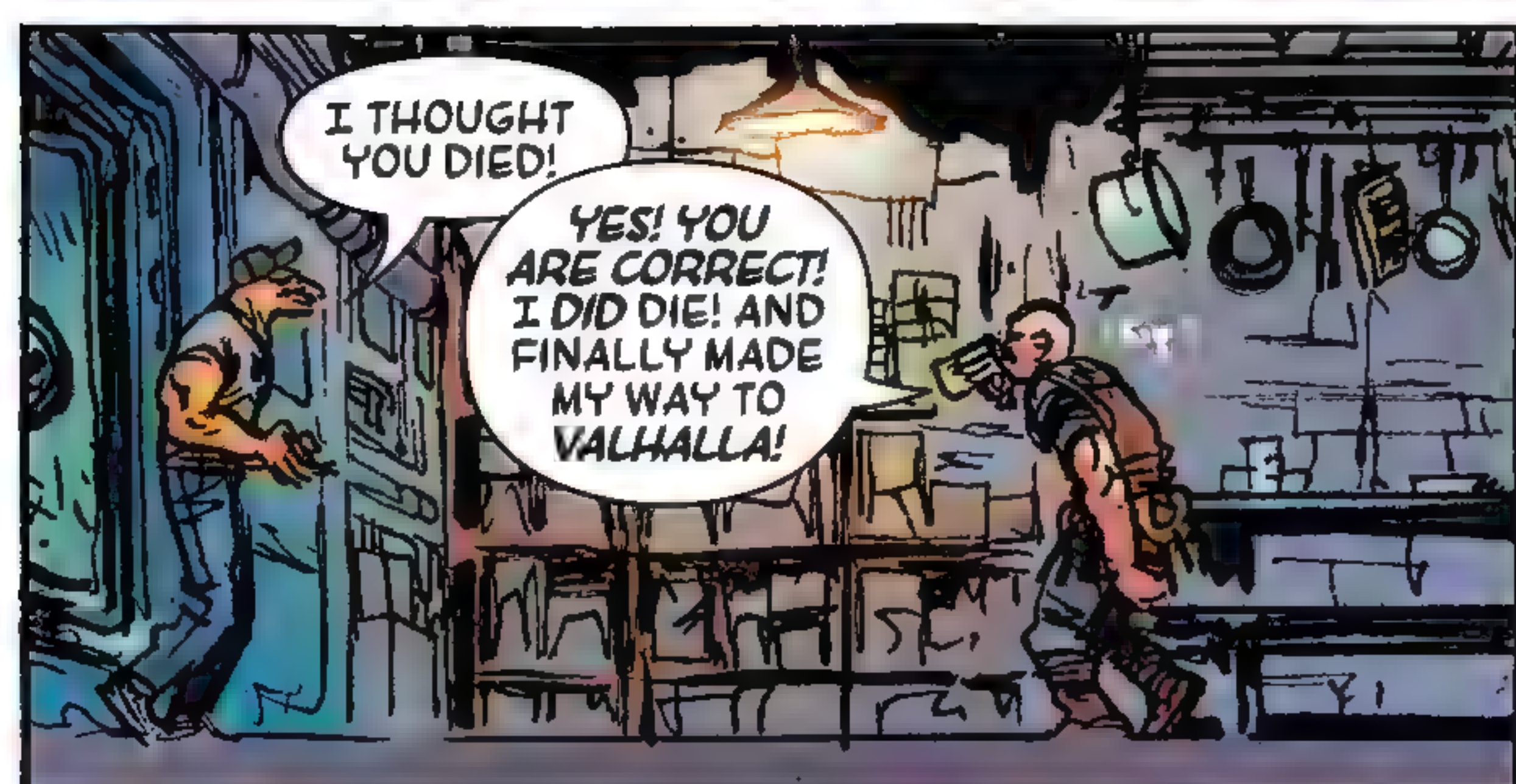


I HAVE A SIGNAL
ON A LIFE-FORM
OF SOME SORT
IN THE GALLEY.



LET'S
CHECK IT
OUT.

!





BUT NO GUNS!
HOW CAN A HEAVENLY
PLACE BE HEAVENLY
WITHOUT GUNS?!



I--

BUT THAT'S
NOT WHY I AM
HERE. BILL...
I MUST BE
HONEST...

WHAT
IS IT?



I SAW WHAT
HAPPENED TO
YOU ON ASGARD.
WITH SIF.



WHAT?!
HOW--?



AS I SAID!
VALHALLA IS
BORING! SOMETIMES
I CANNOT HELP BUT
VISIT MY OLD HOME IN
ETHEREAL FORM. AND
IT WAS DURING THIS
LATEST VISIT...



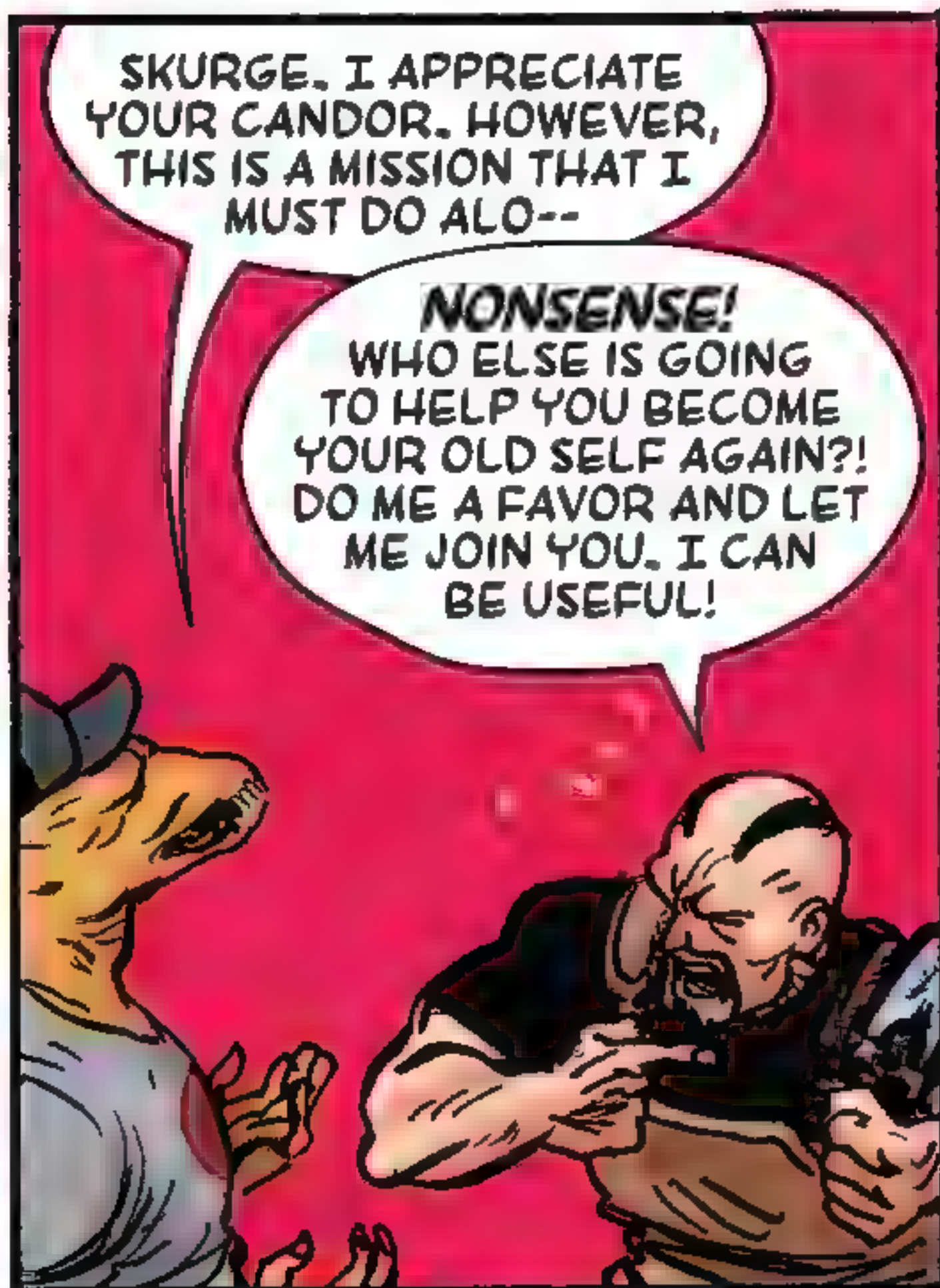
...THAT I
WITNESSED YOUR
REJECTION.



BROTHER...MY SOUL
CRIED OUT FOR YOU.
AND I DEMANDED THE
VALKYRIES GIVE ME
TEMPORARY LEAVE SO
I COULD COME **HELP**
YOU ON YOUR QUEST.
I WANT TO BE YOUR...
AH, WHAT DO THOSE
HUMANS CALL IT--?



AH, YES!
WINGMAN!
THAT'S IT!



SKURGE. I APPRECIATE
YOUR CANDOR. HOWEVER,
THIS IS A MISSION THAT I
MUST DO ALO--

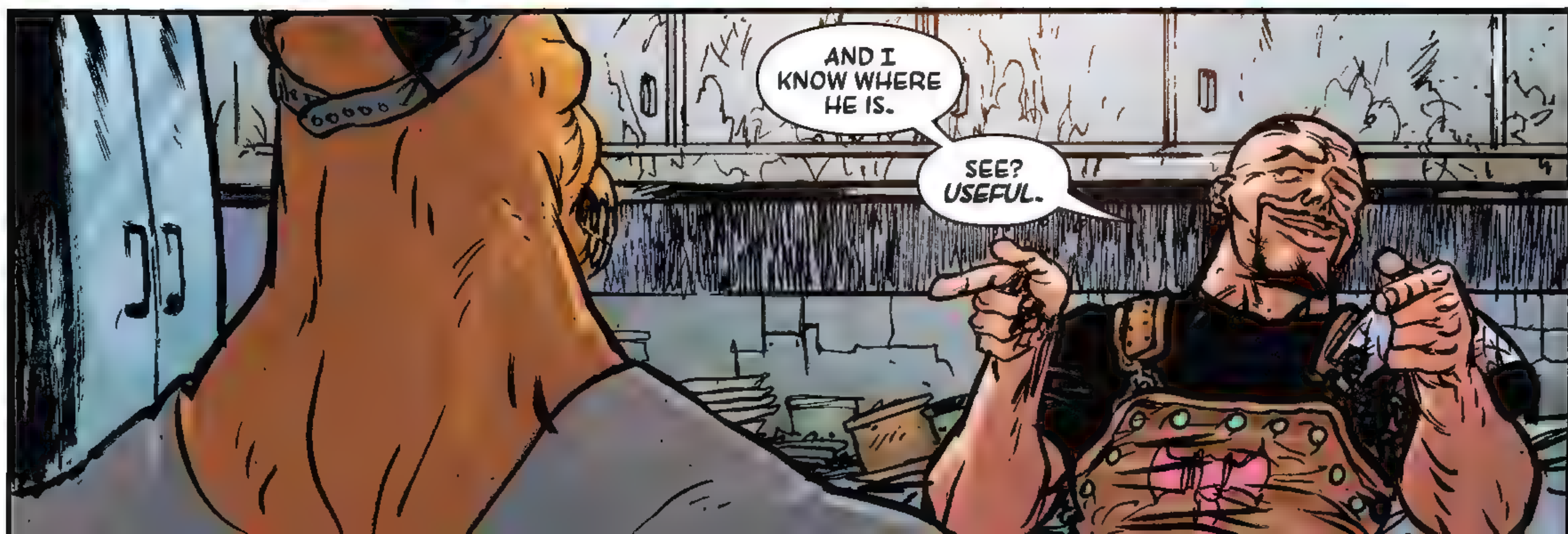
NONSENSE!
WHO ELSE IS GOING
TO HELP YOU BECOME
YOUR OLD SELF AGAIN?!
DO ME A FAVOR AND LET
ME JOIN YOU. I CAN
BE USEFUL!



I DON'T
NEED A WARRIOR,
SKURGE.

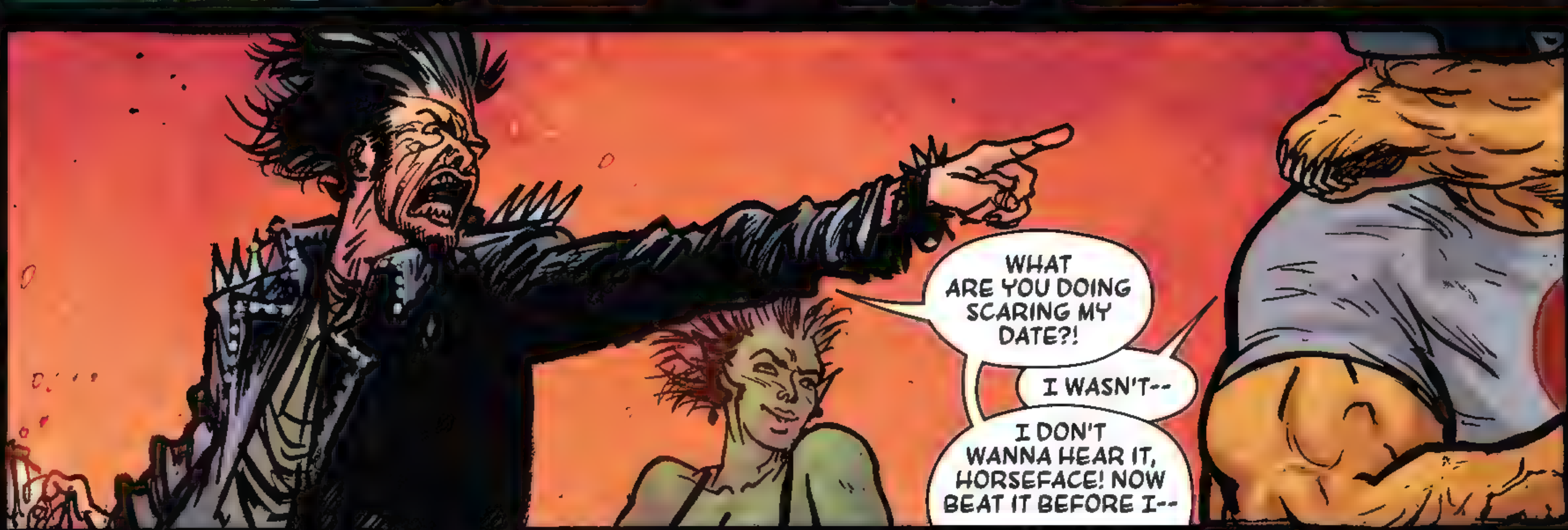
BAH!
IF YOU'RE GOING
ON AN ADVENTURE,
YOU **MUST** HAVE A
WARRIOR!

I'M NOT
GOING TO FIGHT!
I ONLY NEED
INFORMATION!
I NEED TO FIND
ODIN!



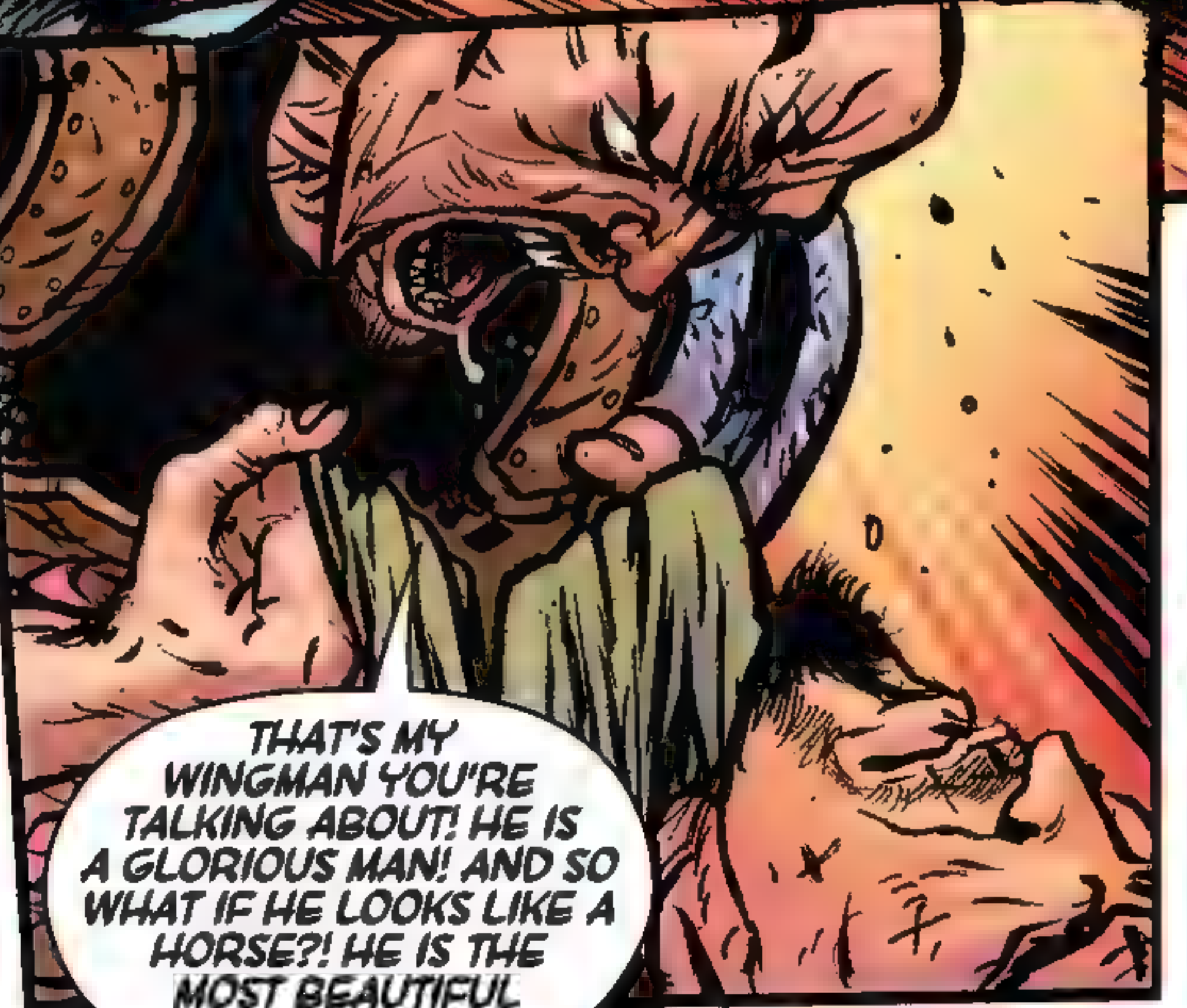
AND I
KNOW WHERE
HE IS.

SEE?
USEFUL.





HOW DARE YOU!!!



THAT'S MY WINGMAN YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT! HE IS A GLORIOUS MAN! AND SO WHAT IF HE LOOKS LIKE A HORSE?! HE IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL HORSE--

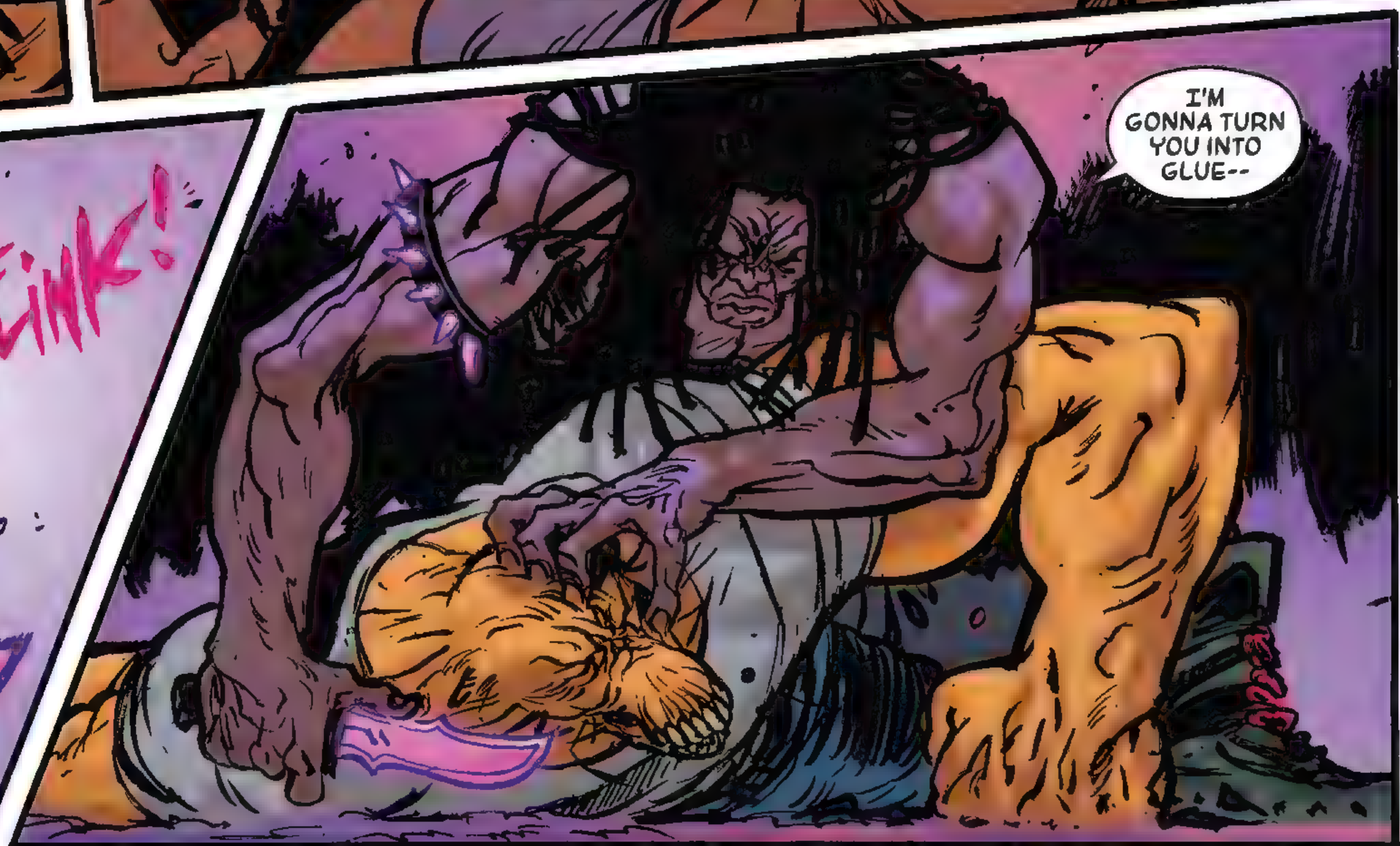
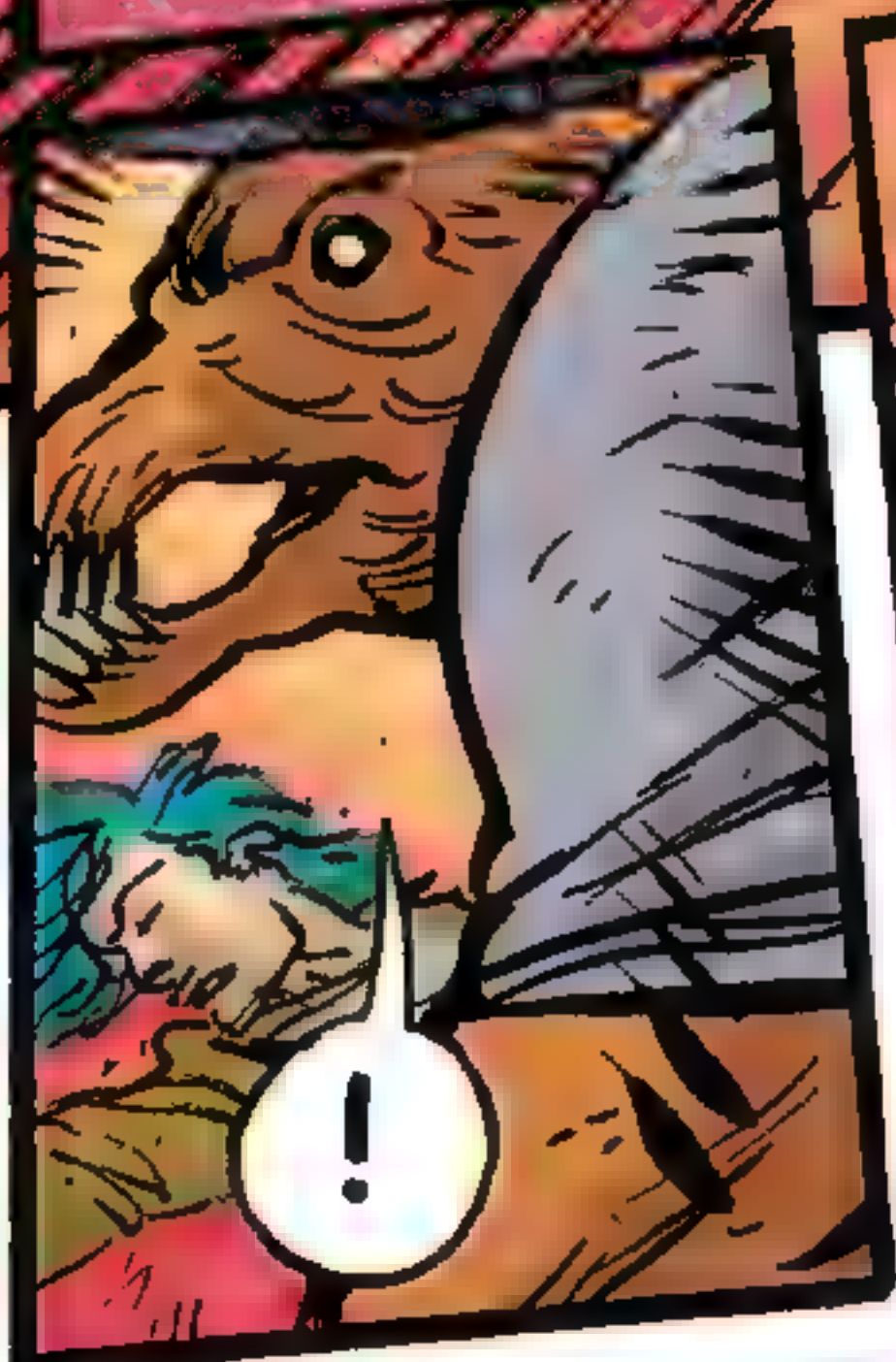


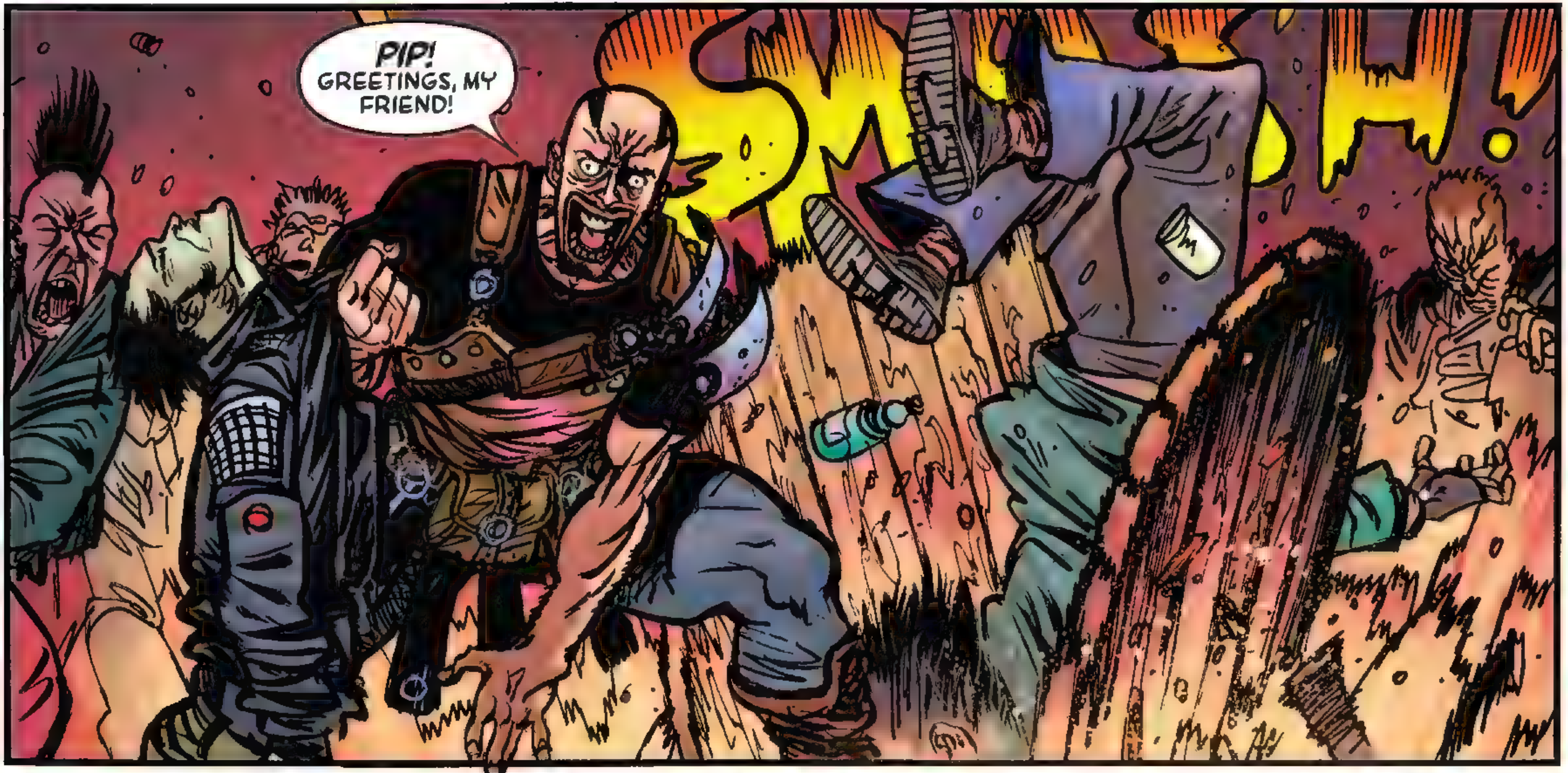
ARGH!!!



LET'S GET 'EM, BOYS!







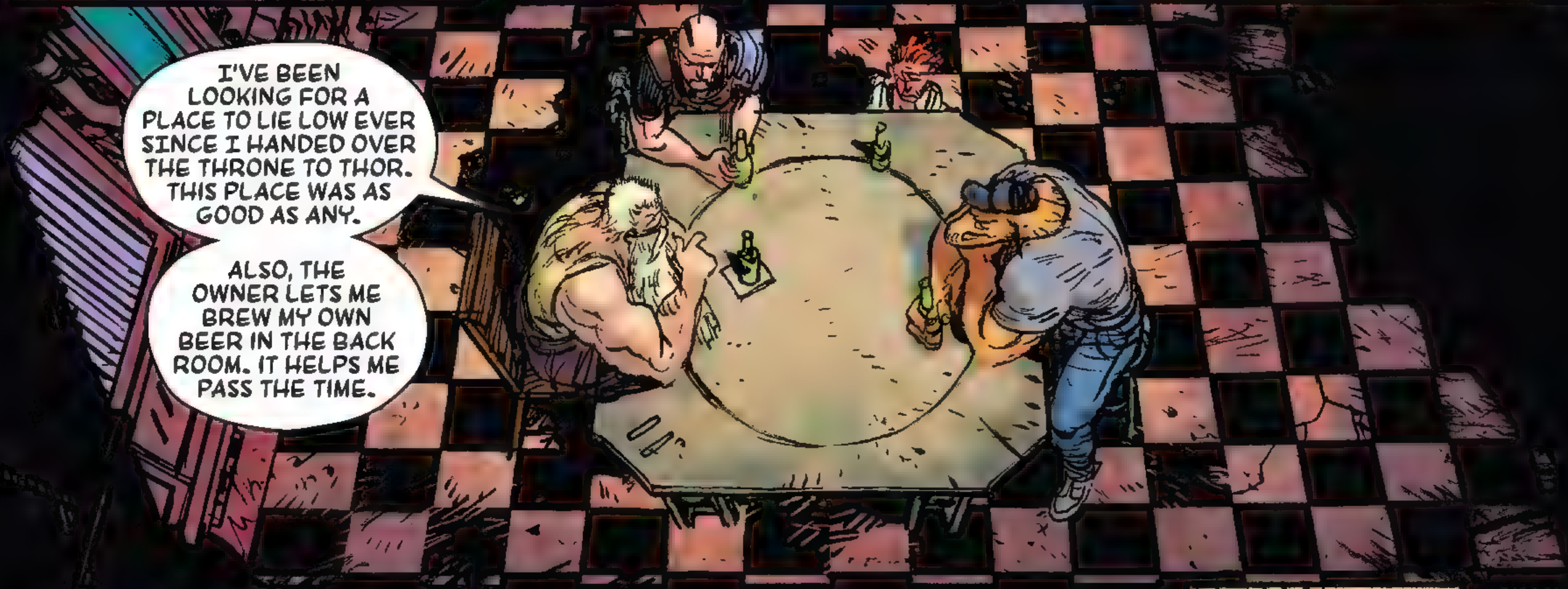


GEOFF! I
THOUGHT I TOLD
YOU THESE BIKER
PUNKS WEREN'T
ALLOWED IN HERE
ANYMORE!



NOT
MY FAULT!
THESE THREE
STARTED IT!

"ODIN, WHY ARE
YOU HERE?"



I'VE BEEN
LOOKING FOR A
PLACE TO LIE LOW EVER
SINCE I HANDED OVER
THE THRONE TO THOR.
THIS PLACE WAS AS
GOOD AS ANY.

ALSO, THE
OWNER LETS ME
BREW MY OWN
BEER IN THE BACK
ROOM. IT HELPS ME
PASS THE TIME.



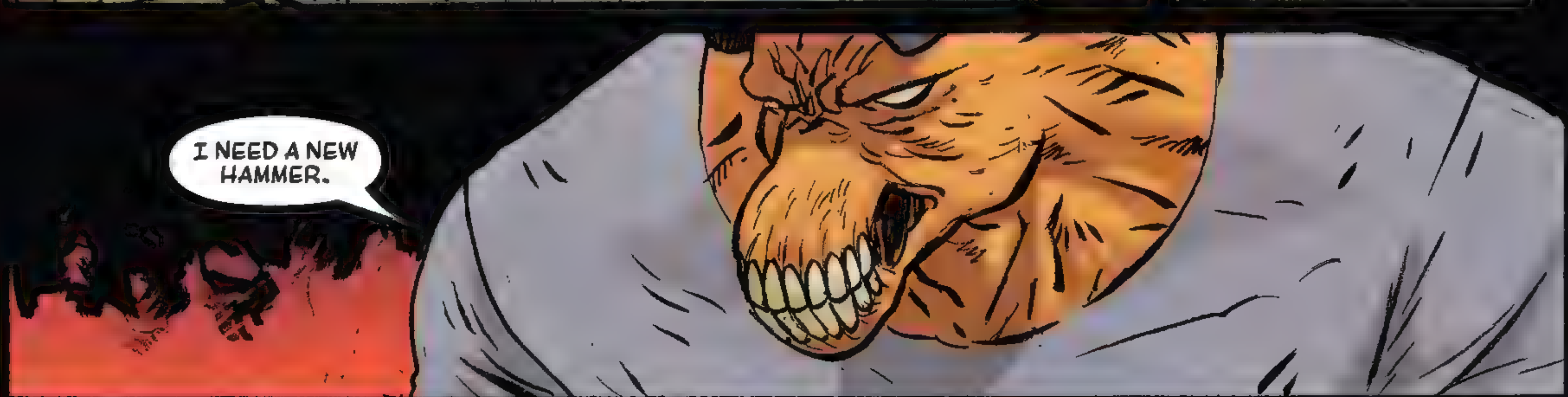
WHAT
DO YOU
THINK?

IT'S...
VERY GOOD,
ALL-FATHER.

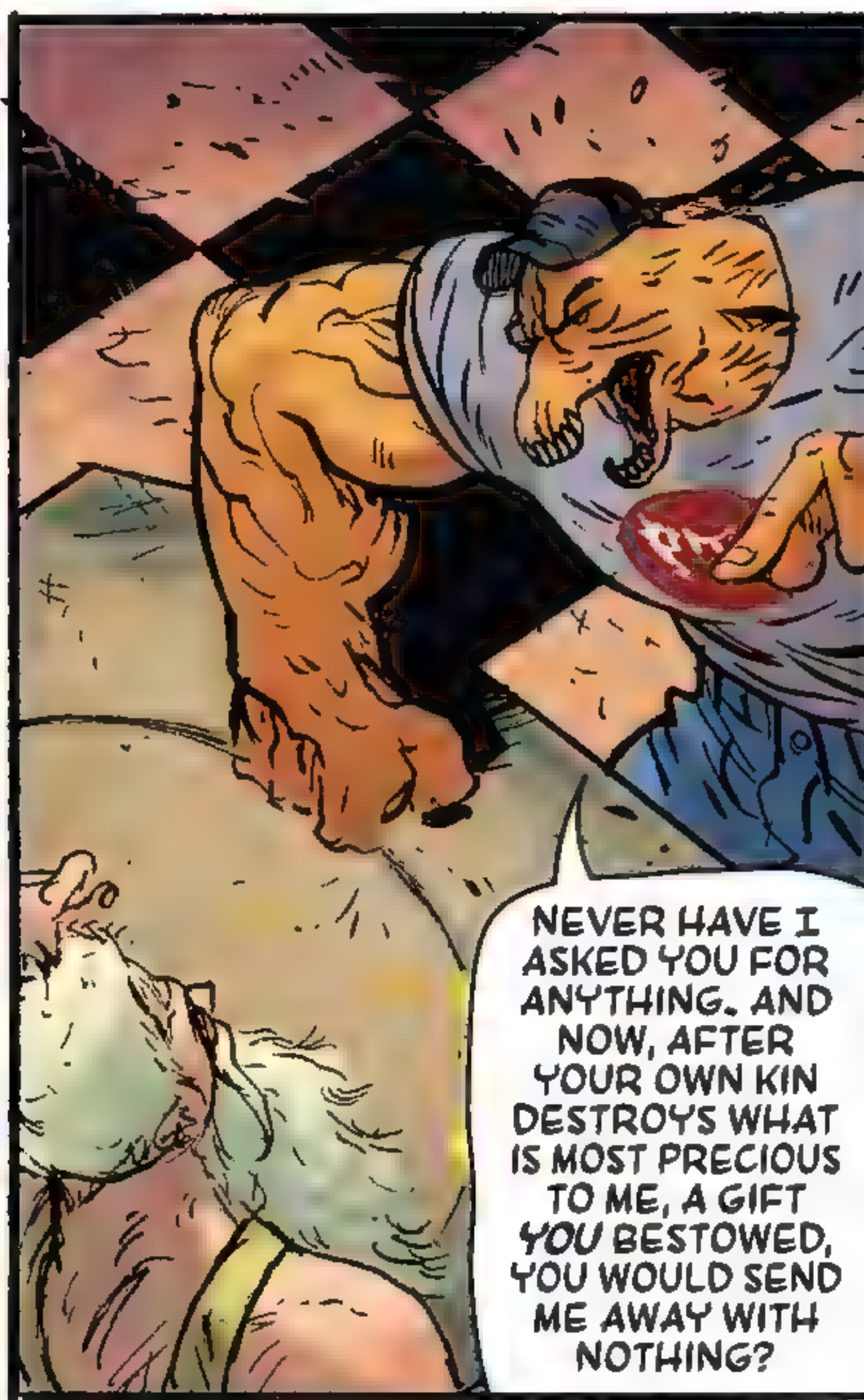
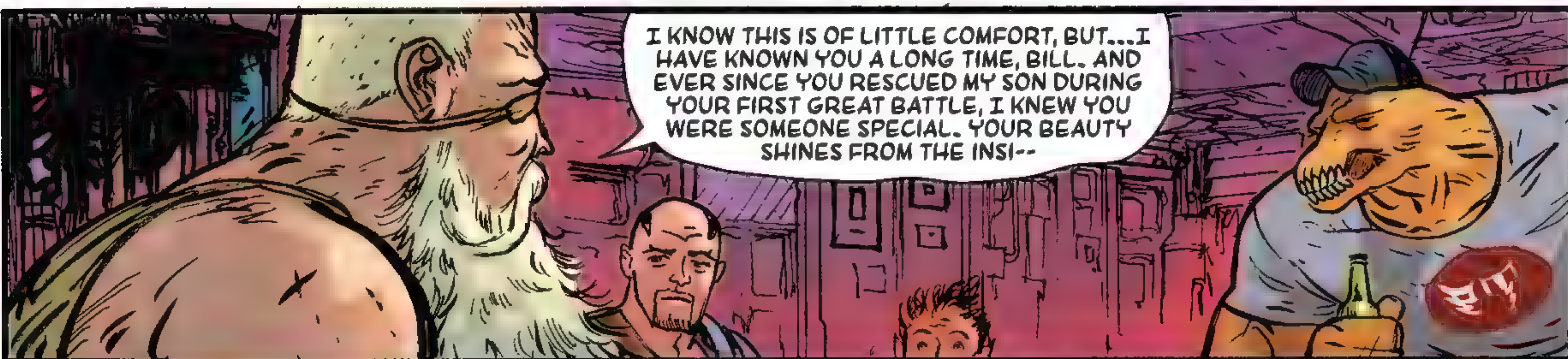
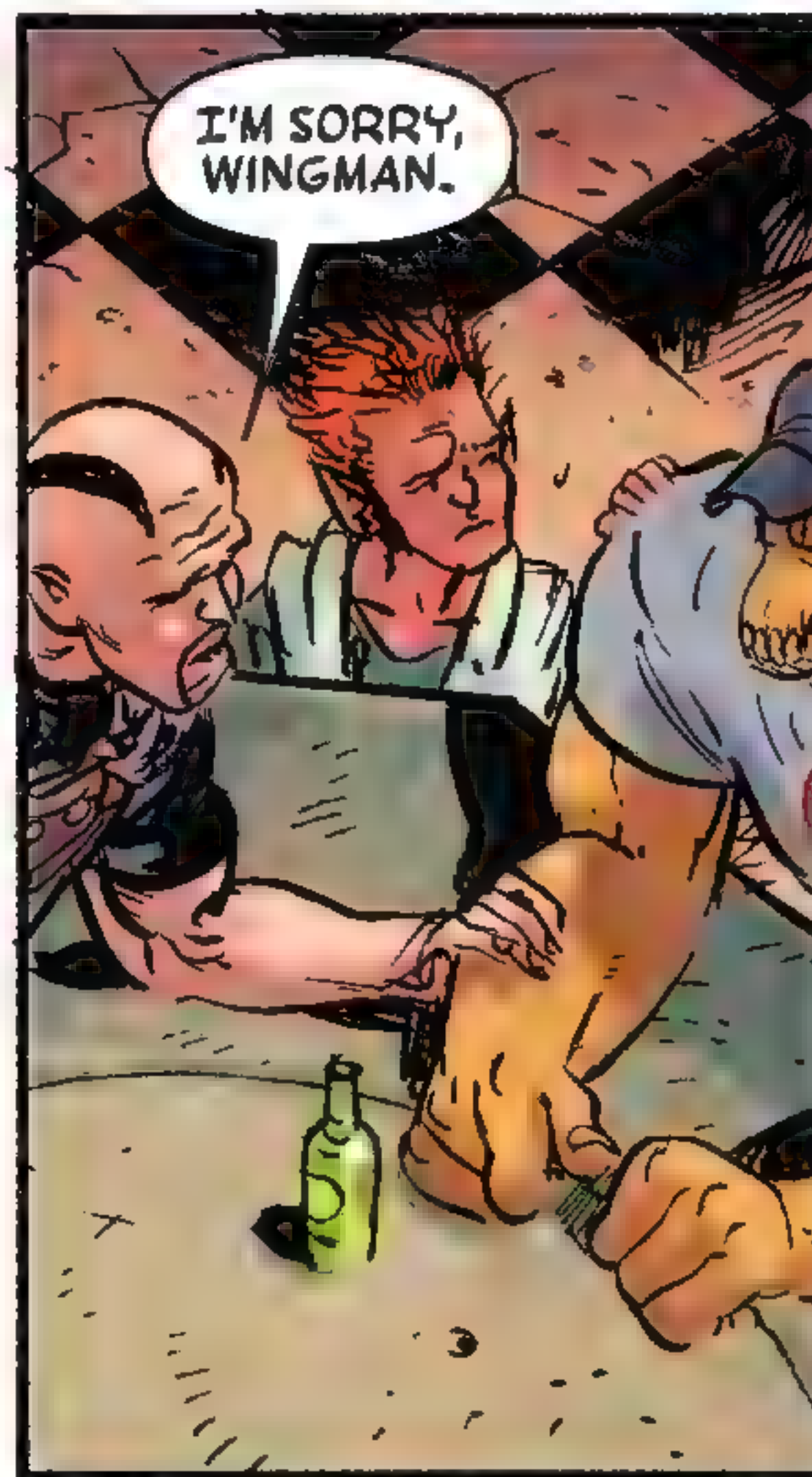
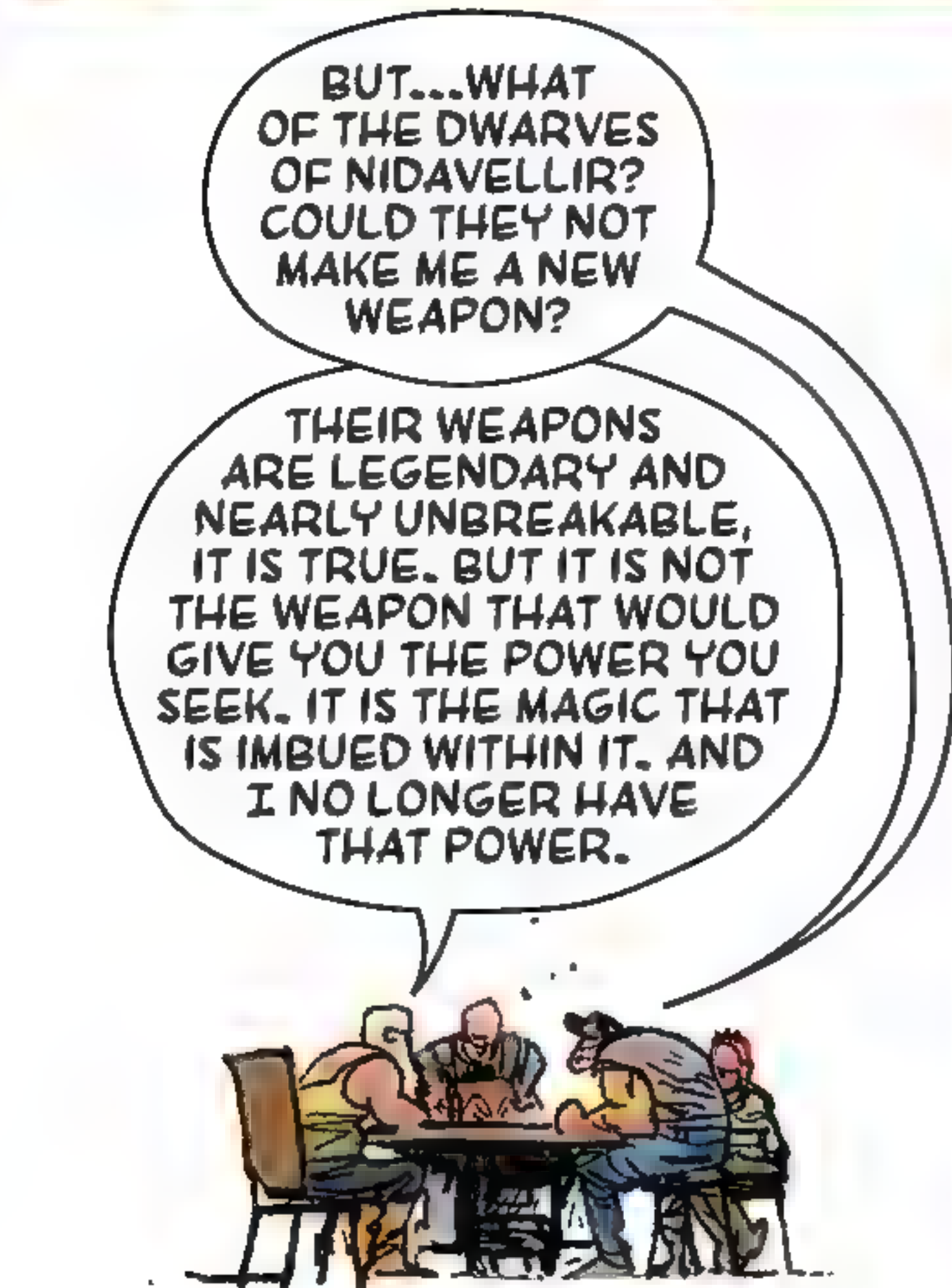
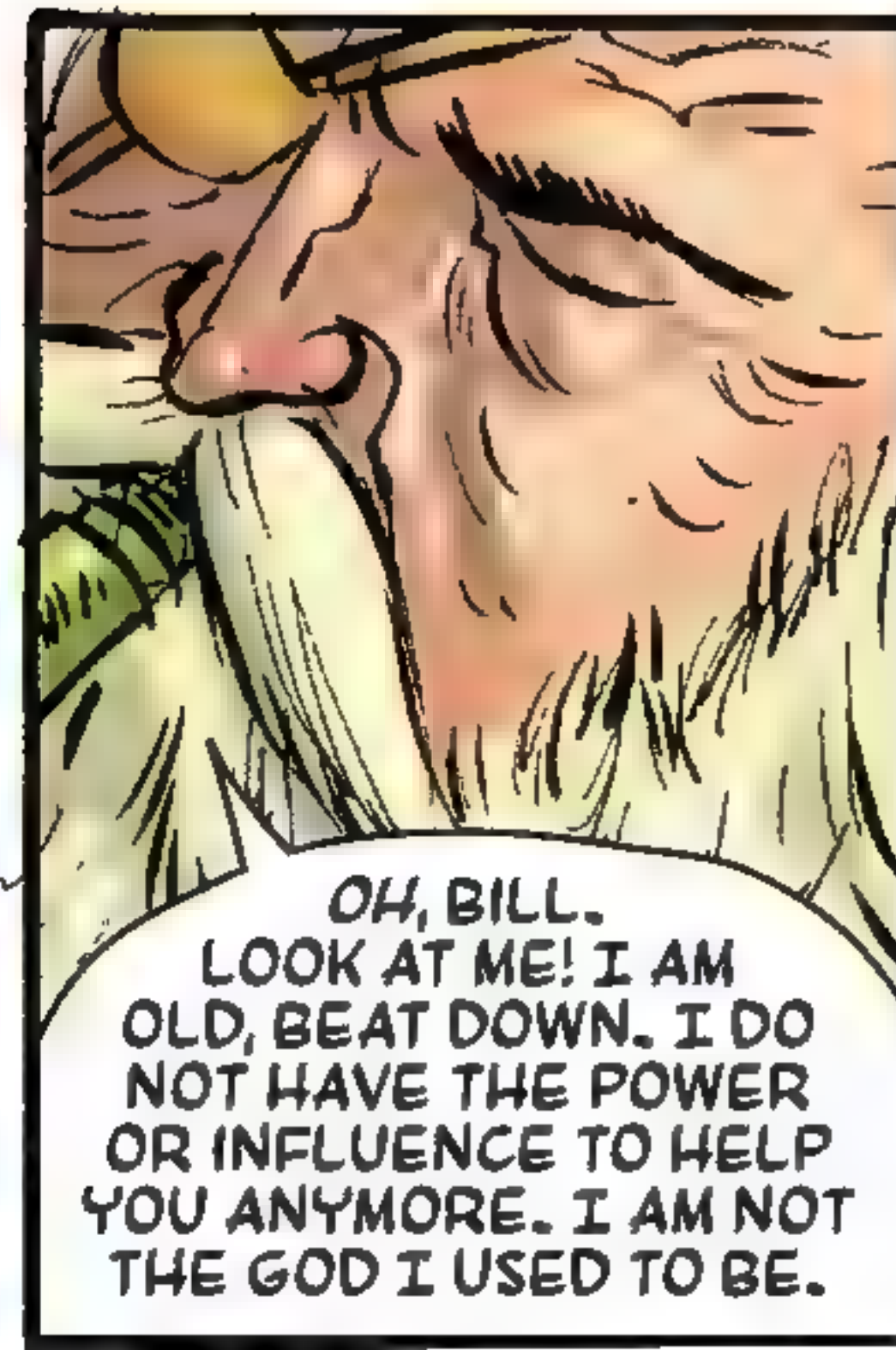
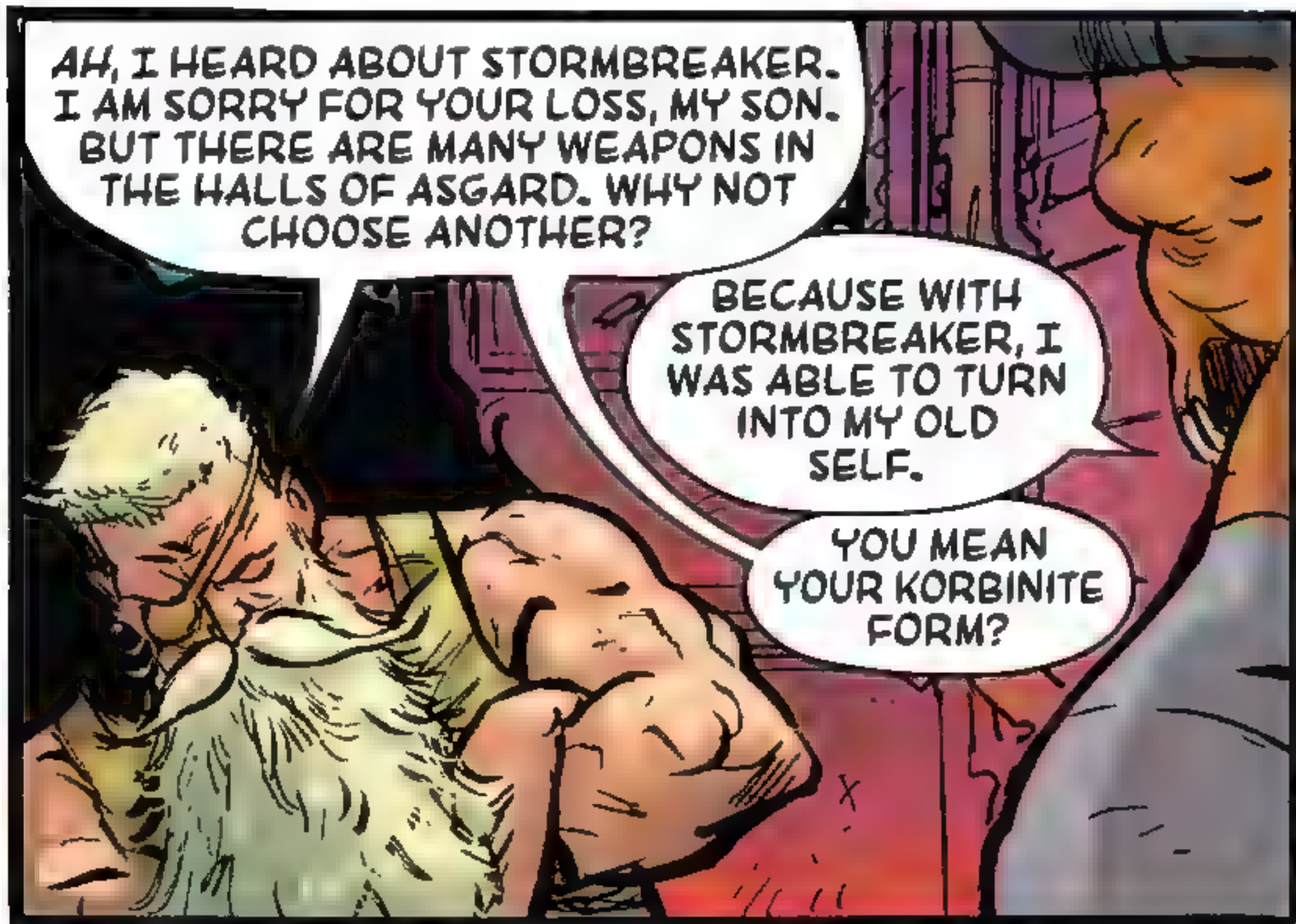
I HAVE
SOMETHING THAT
MIGHT HELP WITH
YOUR BOREDOM,
ODIN.



AND
WHAT MIGHT
THAT BE, BILL?



I NEED A NEW
HAMMER.





BUT IT IS A DARK PATH.

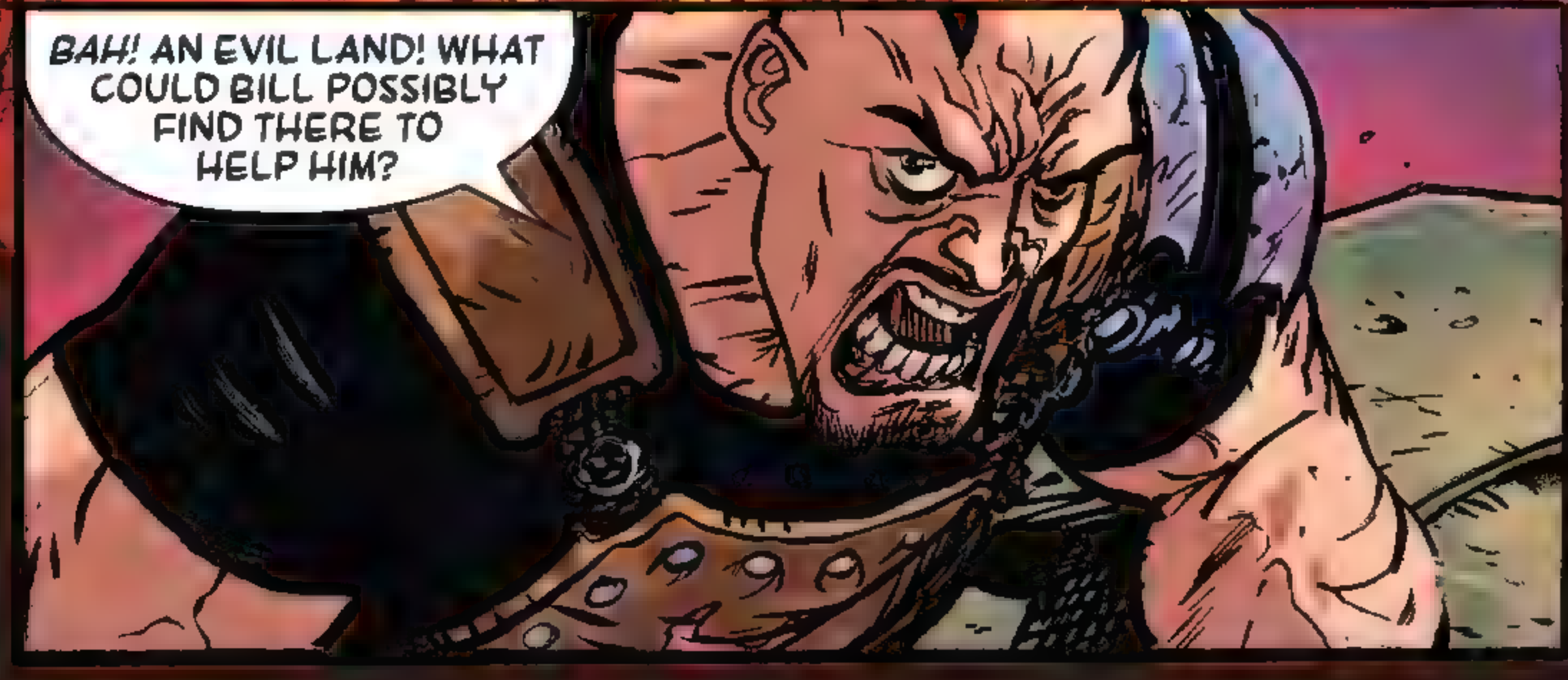
TELL ME WHERE I MUST GO.



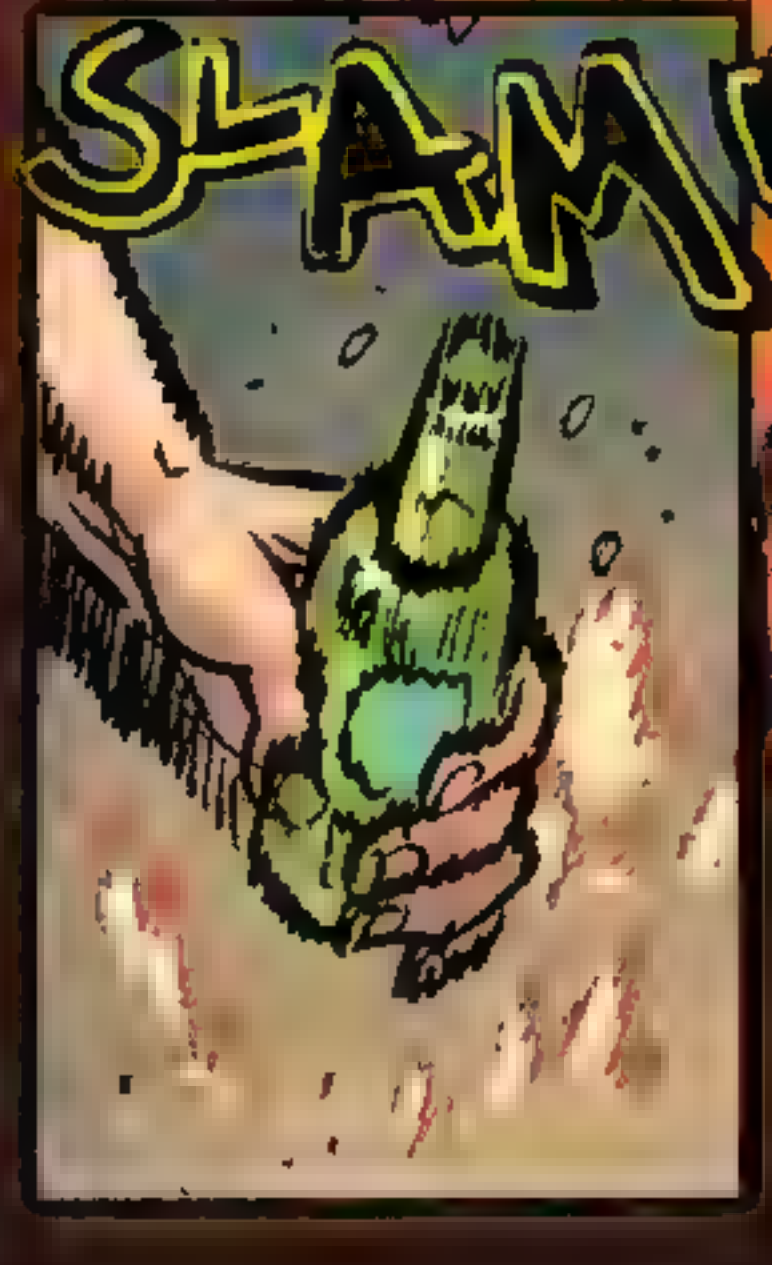
MUSPELHEIM.

"THE REALM OF FIRE. WHERE THE WORST OF OUR KIND AND THE BEASTS THAT THE GODS CANNOT CONTROL GO FOREVER, THEIR SOULS HAUNTED AND WRETCHED.

"THERE ARE MULTIPLE LEVELS THAT TRAVEL DOWN ITS HORRIBLE DEPTHS, DARKER AND DARKER THE DEEPER YOU GO."

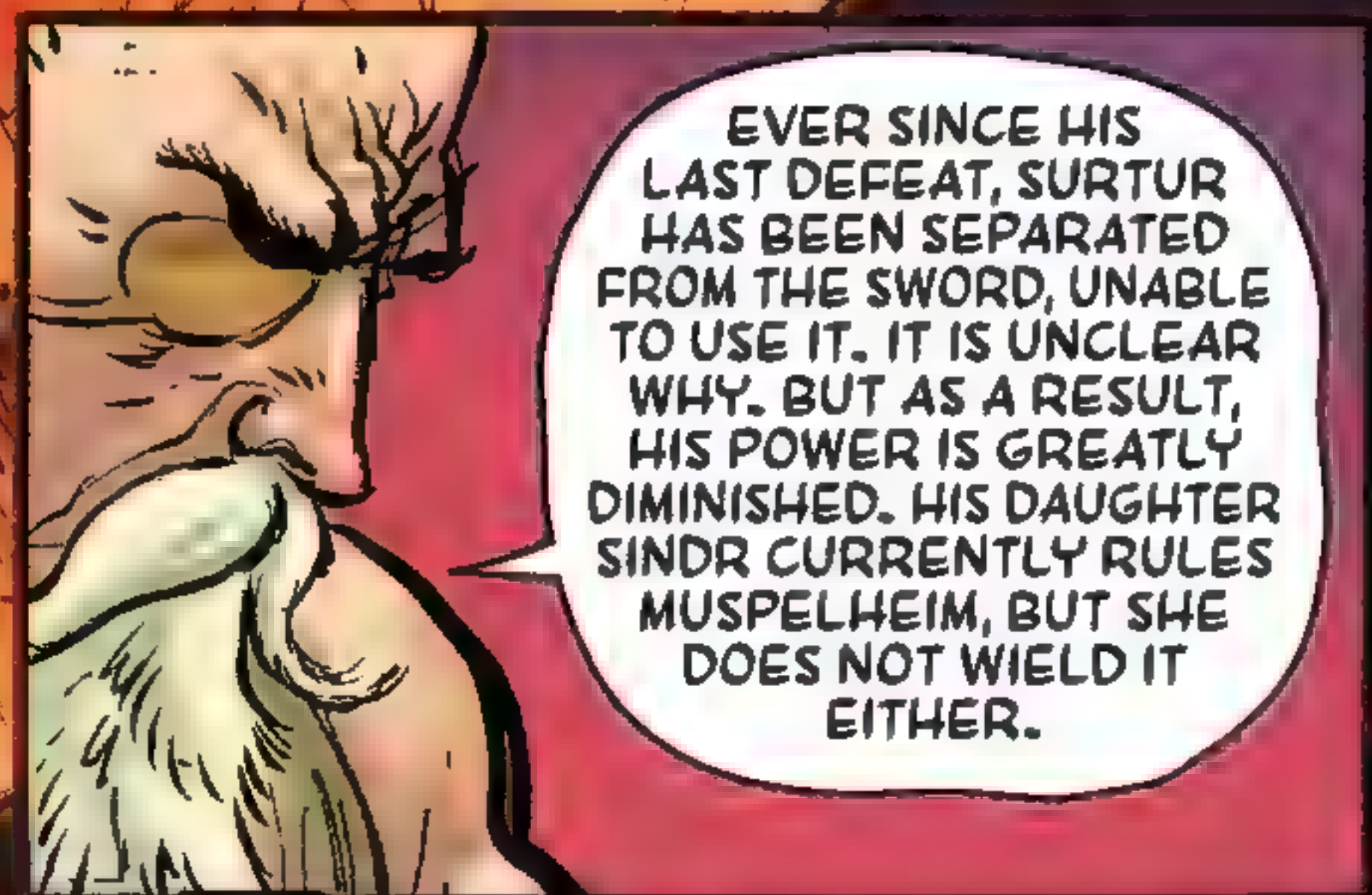


BAH! AN EVIL LAND! WHAT COULD BILL POSSIBLY FIND THERE TO HELP HIM?





"TWILIGHT. THE BLADE OF THE DEMON FIRE GOD, SURTUR."



EVER SINCE HIS LAST DEFEAT, SURTUR HAS BEEN SEPARATED FROM THE SWORD, UNABLE TO USE IT. IT IS UNCLEAR WHY. BUT AS A RESULT, HIS POWER IS GREATLY DIMINISHED. HIS DAUGHTER SINDR CURRENTLY RULES MUSPELHEIM, BUT SHE DOES NOT WIELD IT EITHER.



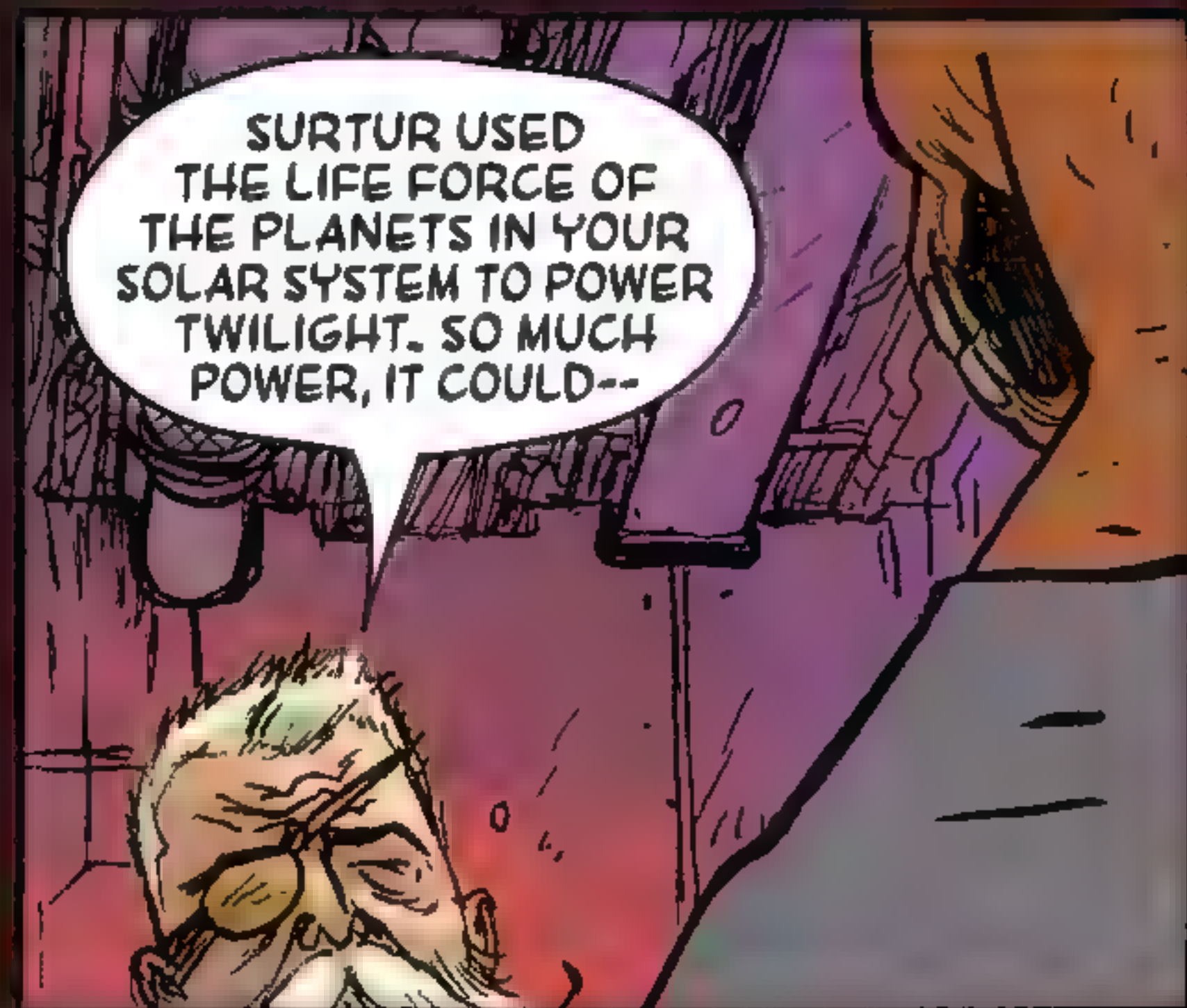
I BELIEVE YOU CAN TAKE THE SWORD AND USE IT FOR YOUR OWN DEVICES.

THIS WEAPON IS AN ENTITY YOU KNOW WELL, BILL.

YES.



"IT WAS SURTUR WHO DESTROYED MY HOME, LONG AGO."



SURTUR USED THE LIFE FORCE OF THE PLANETS IN YOUR SOLAR SYSTEM TO POWER TWILIGHT. SO MUCH POWER, IT COULD--



TURN ME BACK...INTO MY OLD SELF AGAIN.



YES.



"THE SWORD LIES IN THE DEEPEST LEVEL OF MUSPELHEIM. IT WILL BE A TERRIBLE JOURNEY."

OUR COURSE IS ENGAGED. WE WILL BE AT OUR DESTINATION IN A FEW HOURS.

THANK YOU, SKUTT.



BILL? ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DO THIS?

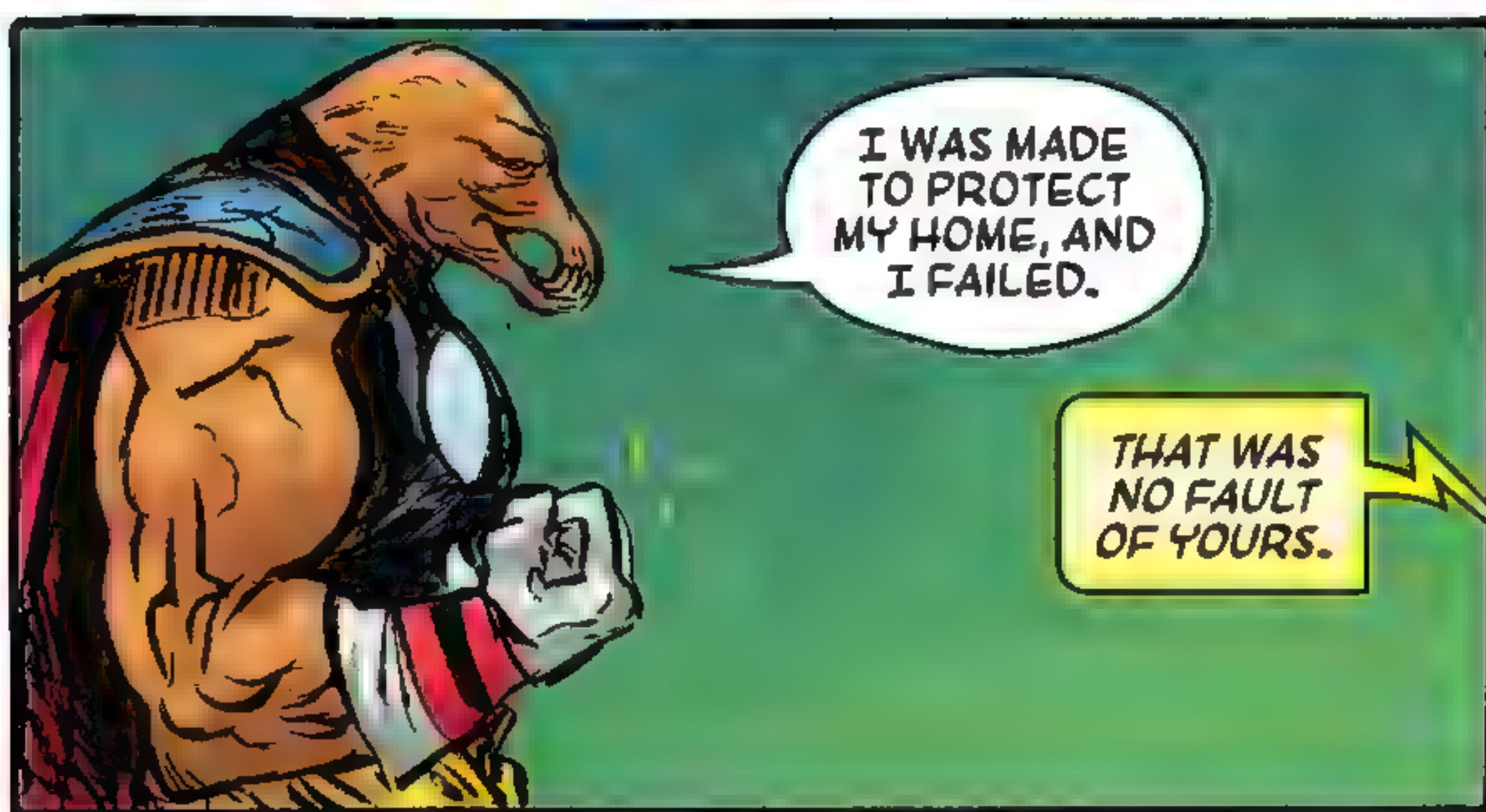


SKUTT, DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME WE FACED SURTUR?



"I DO."

"IT IS HARD TO FORGET."

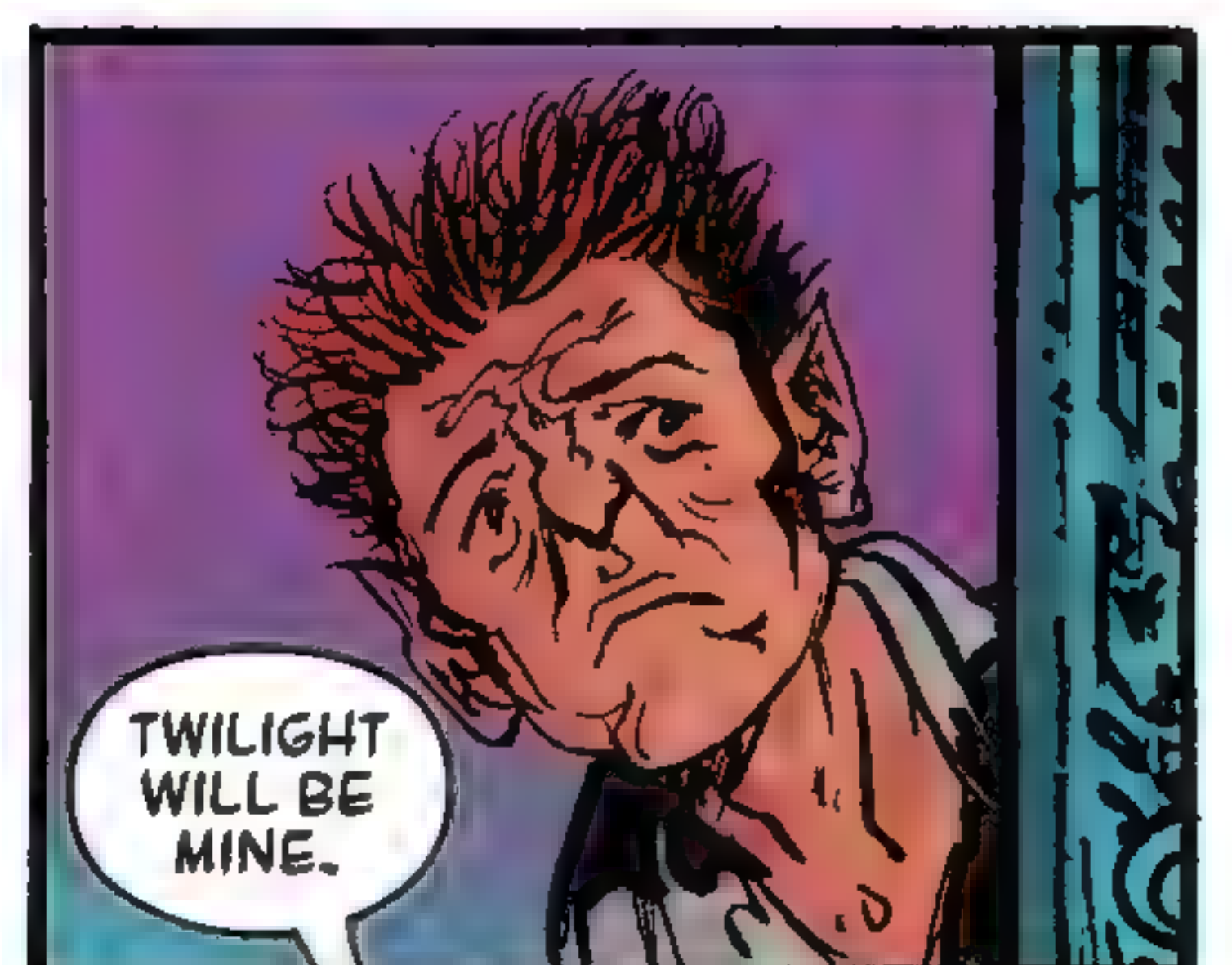
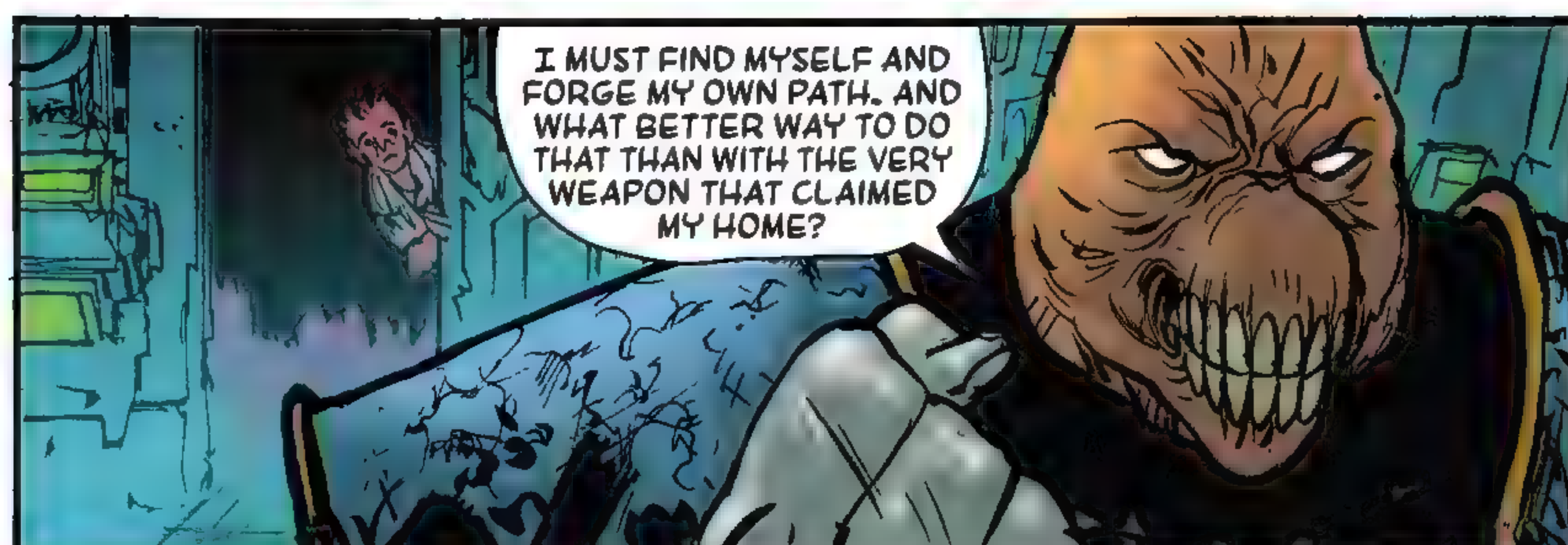
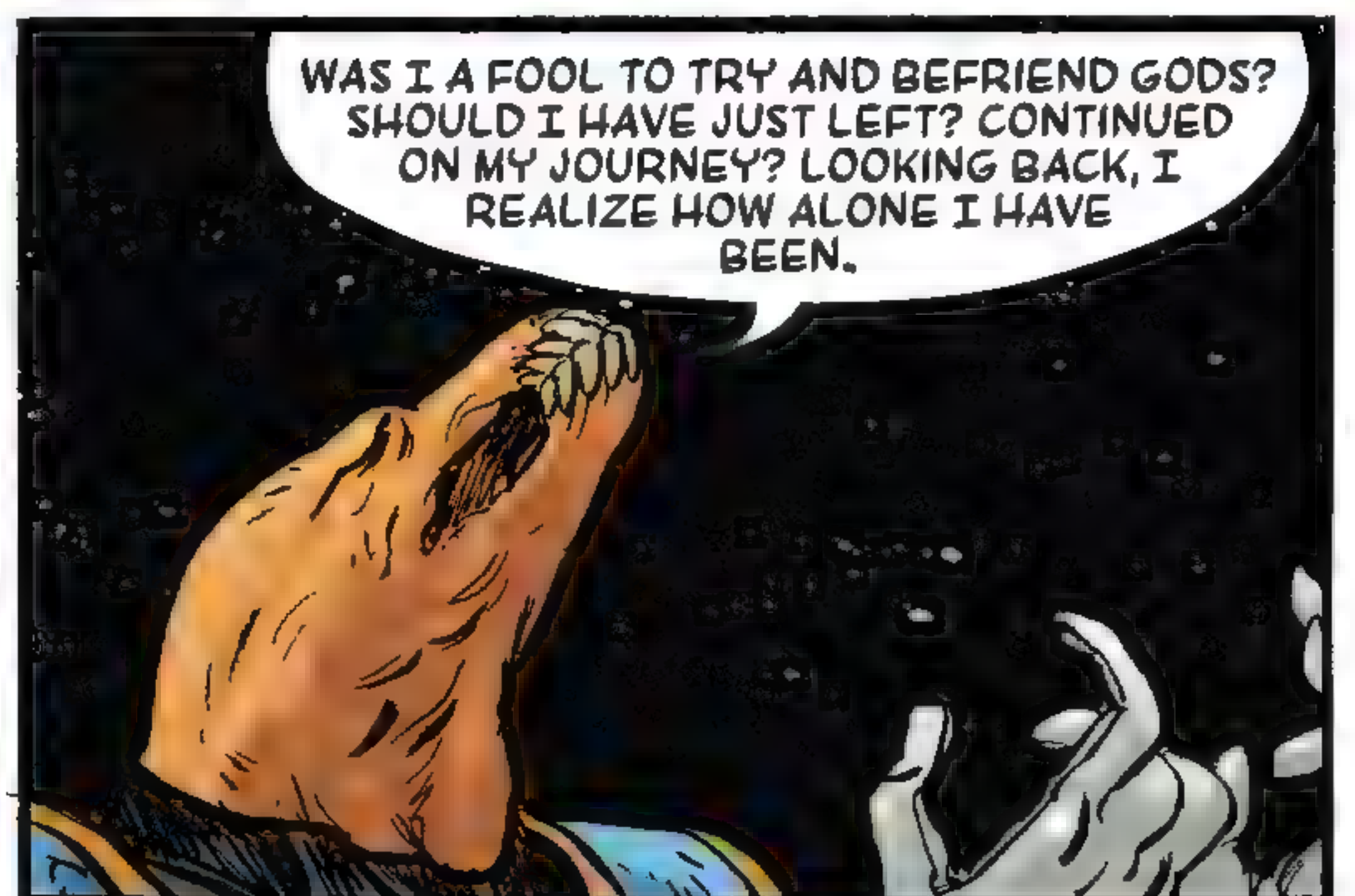


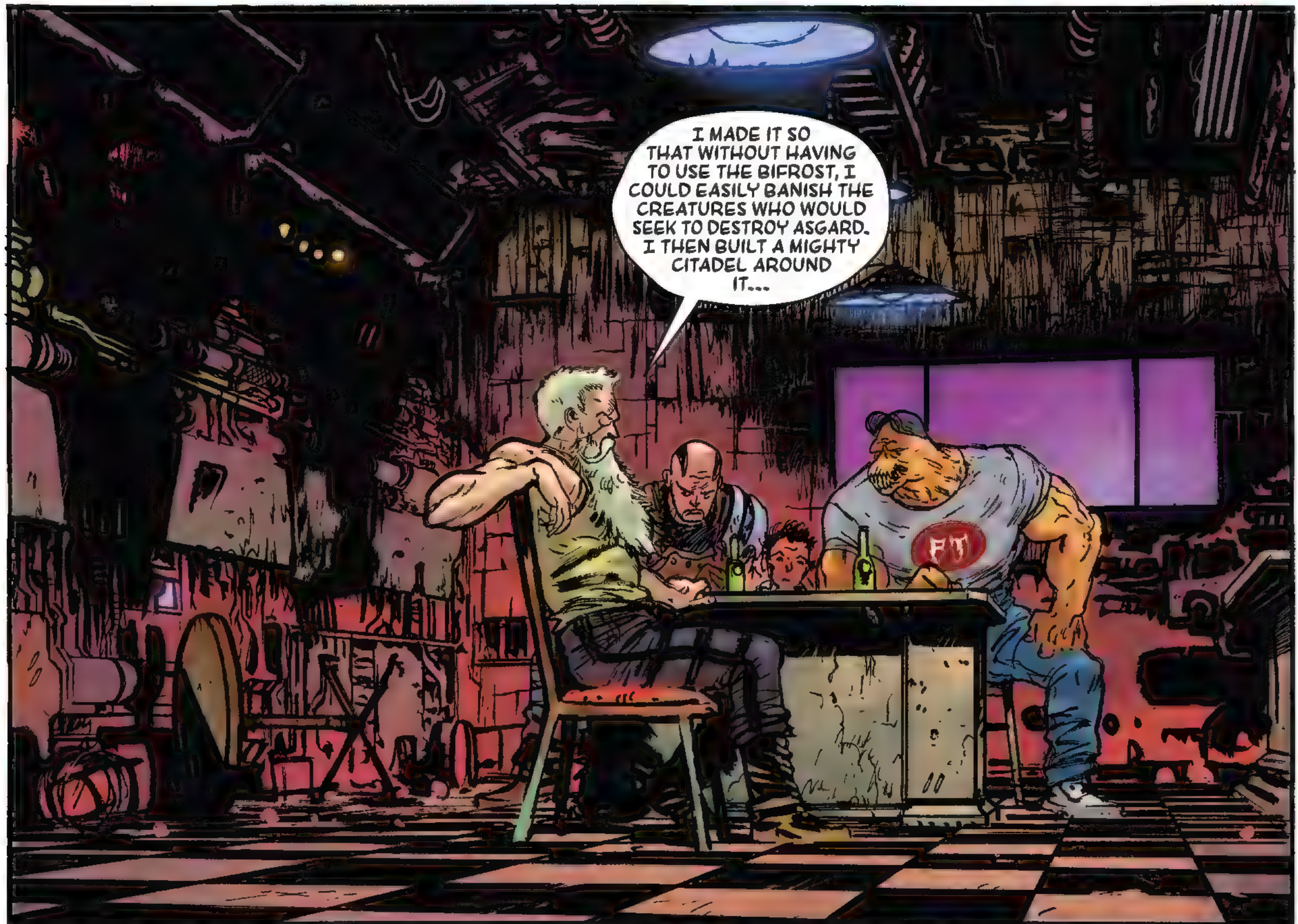
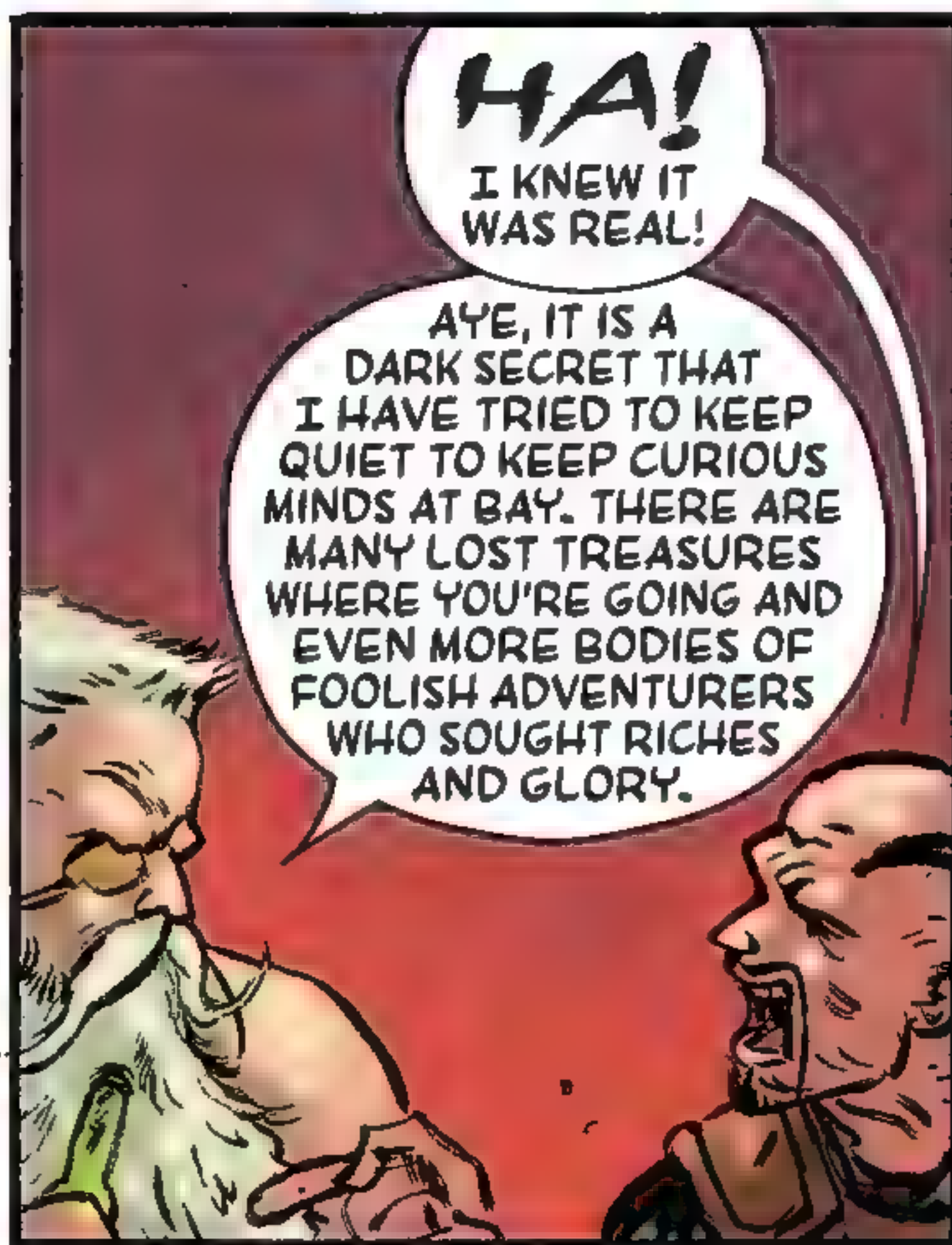
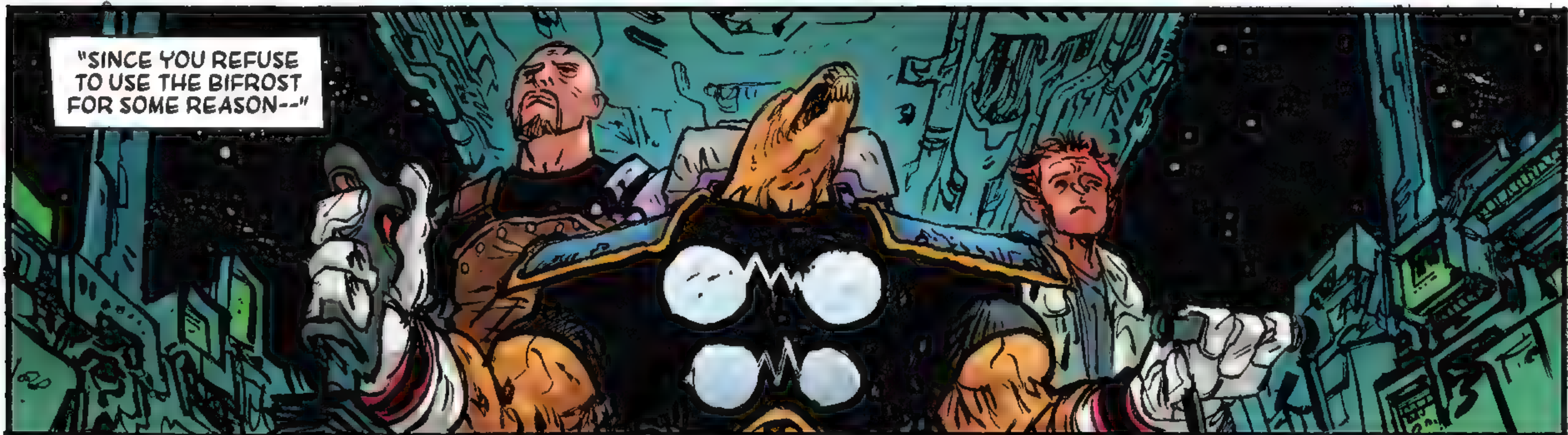
I WAS MADE TO PROTECT MY HOME, AND I FAILED.

THAT WAS NO FAULT OF YOURS.

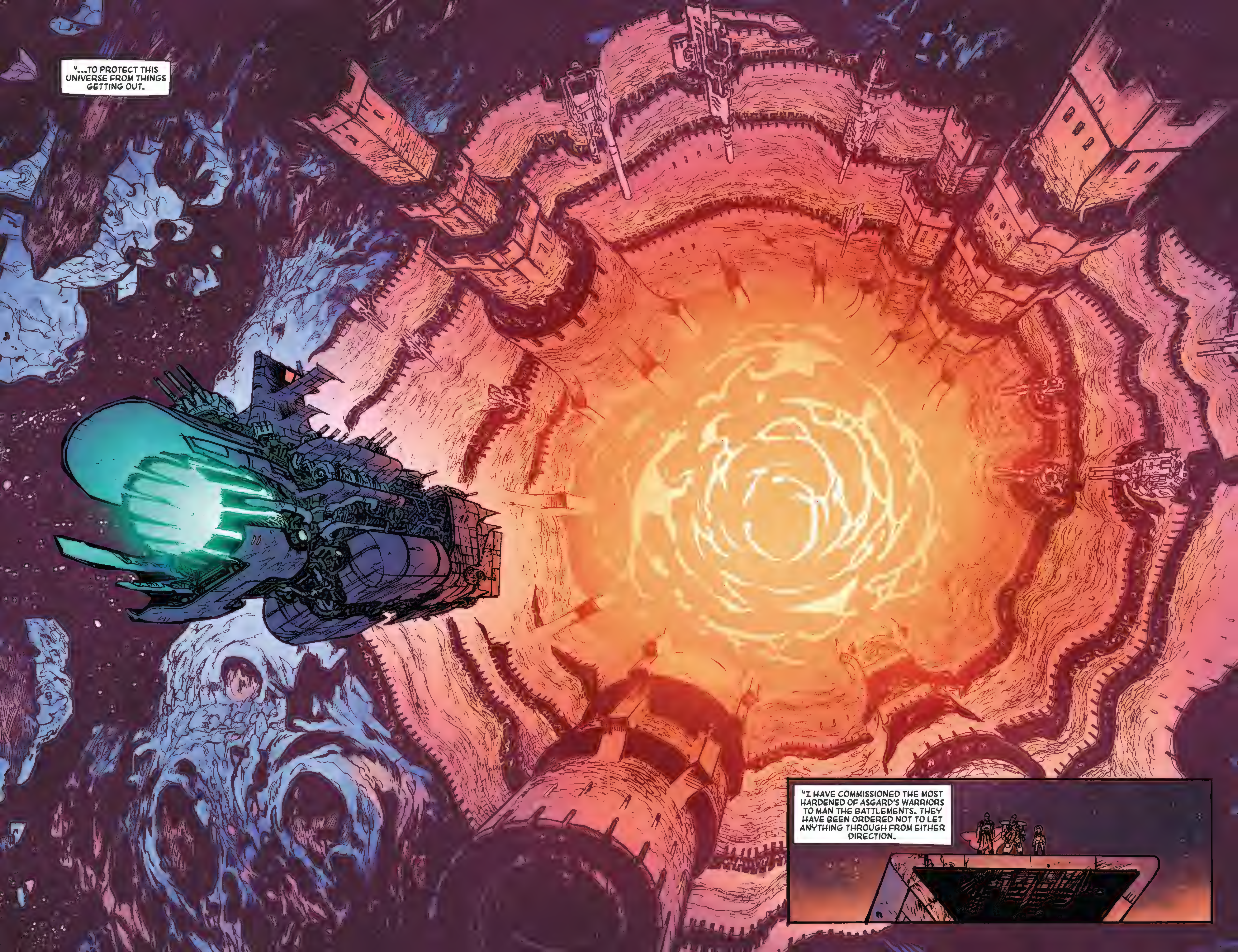


YES, IT WAS.





"...TO PROTECT THIS
UNIVERSE FROM THINGS
GETTING OUT.



"I HAVE COMMISSIONED THE MOST
HARDENED OF ASGARD'S WARRIORS
TO MAN THE BATTLEMENTS. THEY
HAVE BEEN ORDERED NOT TO LET
ANYTHING THROUGH FROM EITHER
DIRECTION.



"I WILL NOTIFY
THEM OF YOUR
ARRIVAL."

STAY
YOURSELF,
TRAVELERS.

ODIN HAS
TOLD US OF YOUR
DESIRE TO ENTER
THE REALM
OF FIRE.

MUSPELHEIM.

MUSPELHEIM.

CHAOS.

CHAOS.

REIGNS.

WE SHALL
ALLOW YOU
TO PASS, BUT
HEED OUR
WARNING.

NO
PERSON.

NOR
BEAST.

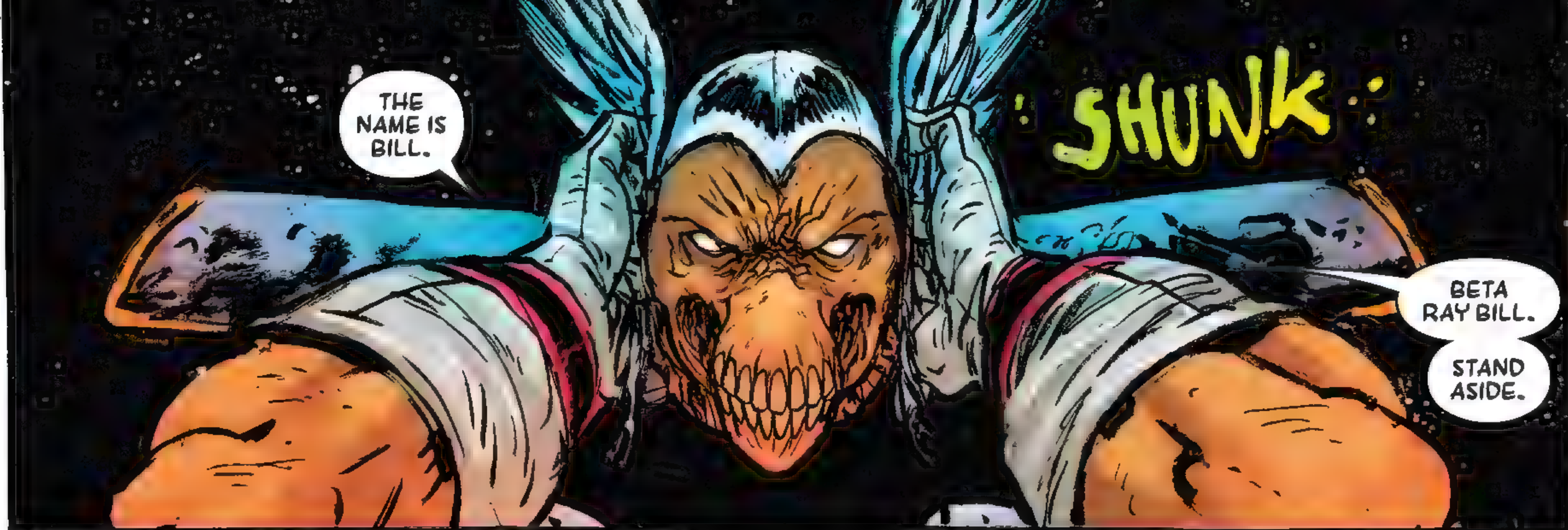
HAS EVER
RETURNED
FROM THESE
GATES.

THE
SOULS THAT
ENTER ARE
CHANGED.

A BLACKENED
HOLLOW BURNS IN
THEIR EYES. WHAT
THEY ONCE WERE
IS FOREVER
GONE.

IF YOU
RETURN WITH
THAT BLACKNESS, YOU
WILL BE CONFRONTED
BY US AND TASTE
OUR STEEL.

DO YOU
UNDERSTAND US,
KORBINITE?

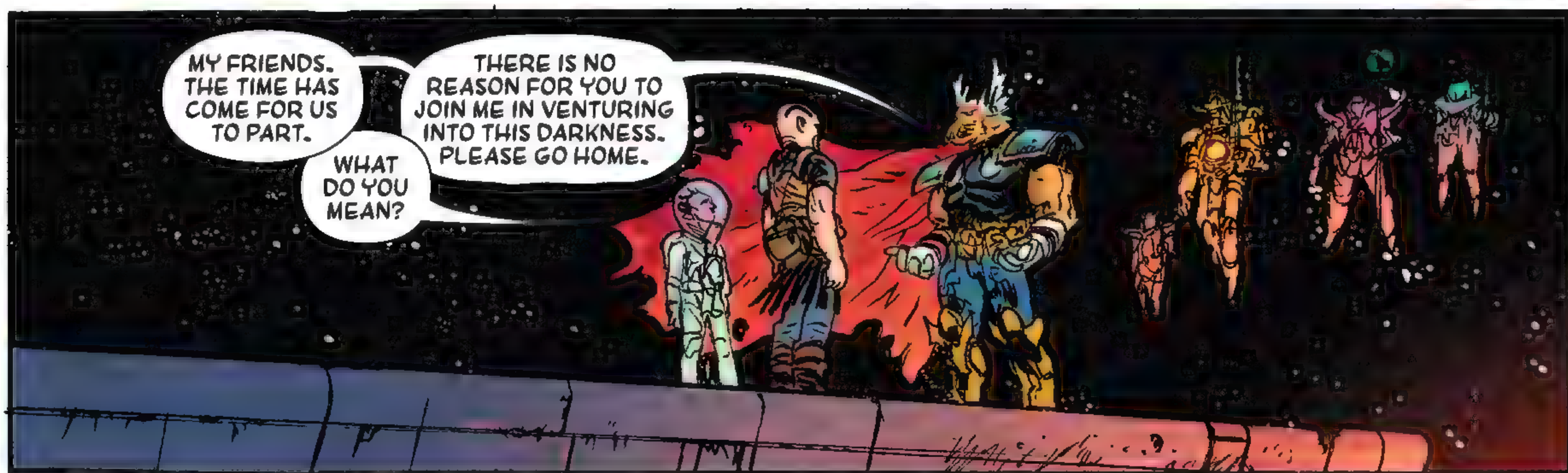


THE
NAME IS
BILL.

SHUNK

BETA
RAY BILL.

STAND
ASIDE.



MY FRIENDS.
THE TIME HAS
COME FOR US
TO PART.

WHAT
DO YOU
MEAN?

THERE IS NO
REASON FOR YOU TO
JOIN ME IN VENTURING
INTO THIS DARKNESS.
PLEASE GO HOME.



SCREW
THAT! I'M NOT READY
TO GO BACK TO BORING
OLD VALHALLA! AND
BESIDES, YOU NEED ME! I
AM WELL ACQUAINTED
WITH HELLISH PLACES,
AND I AM HERE FOR
YOU. UNTIL YOUR GOAL
IS ACCOMPLISHED, I
WILL STAY.



AND YOU,
PIP? WHY JOIN
ME? WHY ARE
YOU EVEN
HERE?



DO YOU
THINK YOU'RE
THE ONLY ONE IN THE
UNIVERSE THAT HATES
WHO THEY ARE ON
THE OUTSIDE?



I AM A TROLL.
THE DEFINITION OF
REPULSIVE. YOU DESIRE
TO LOVE YOURSELF, AND
SO DO I. SO UNTIL I KNOW
HOW TO DO THAT, I HAVE
DECIDED TO FOLLOW
YOU.



VERY
WELL....



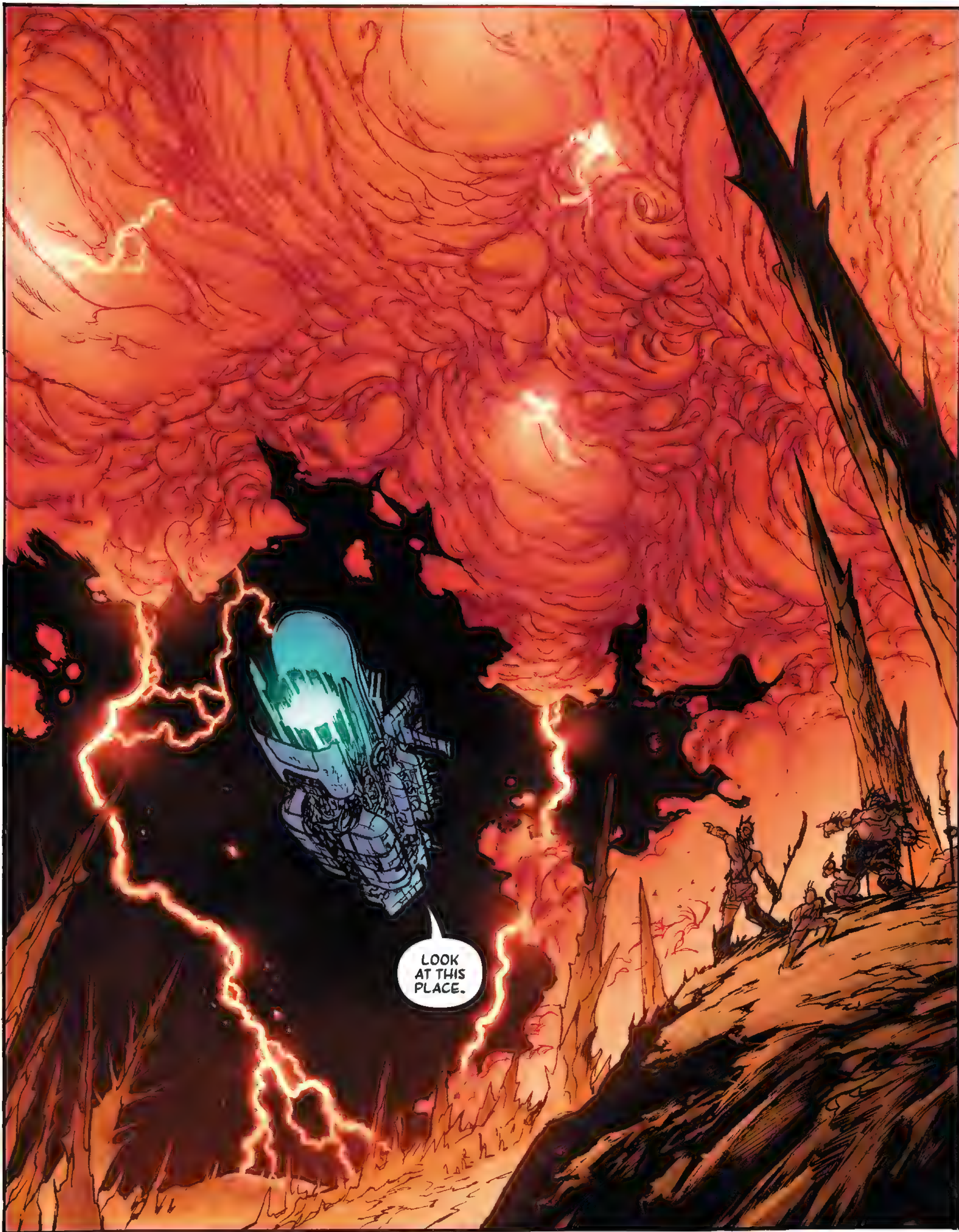
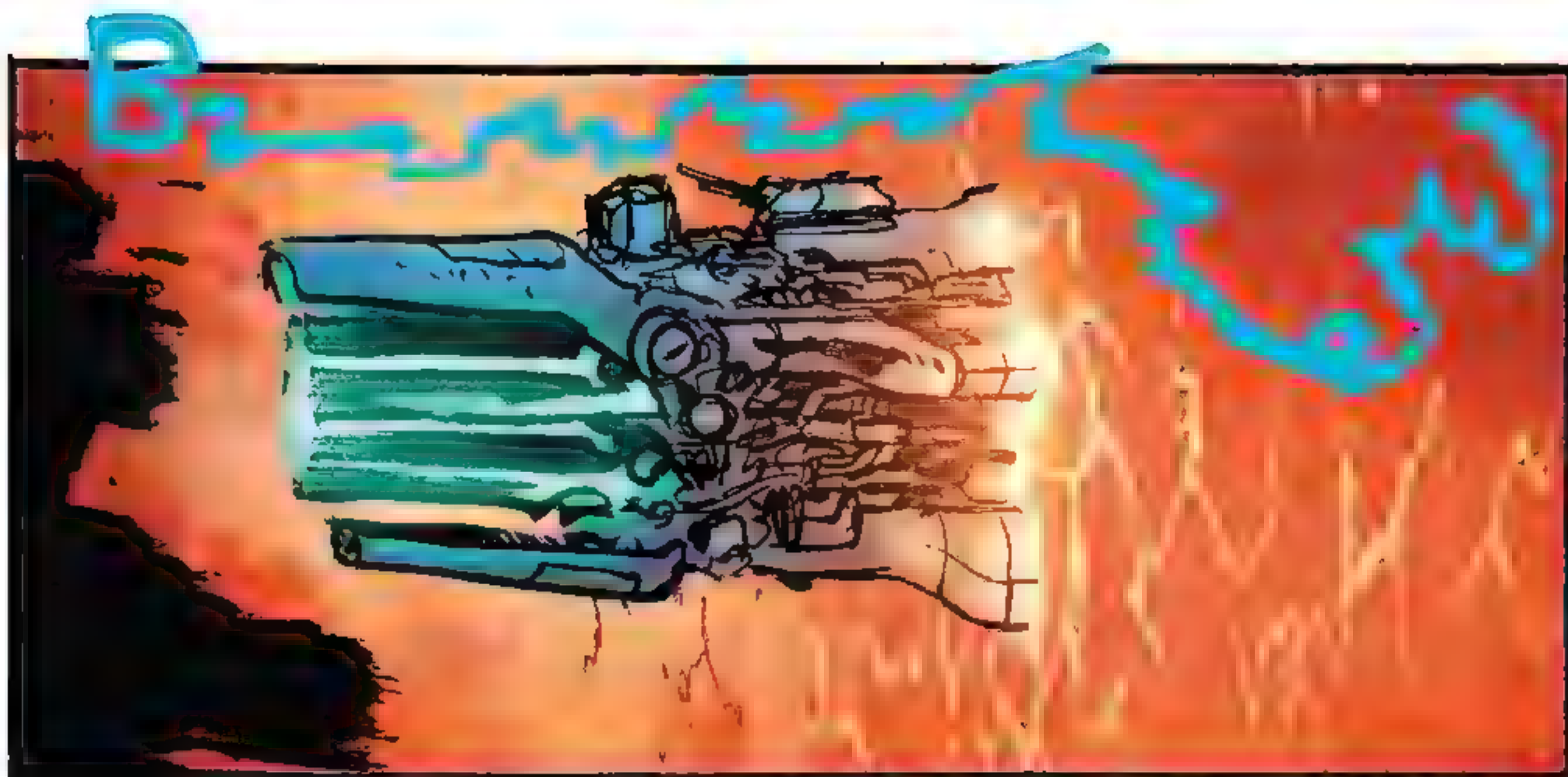
"...ONWARD."

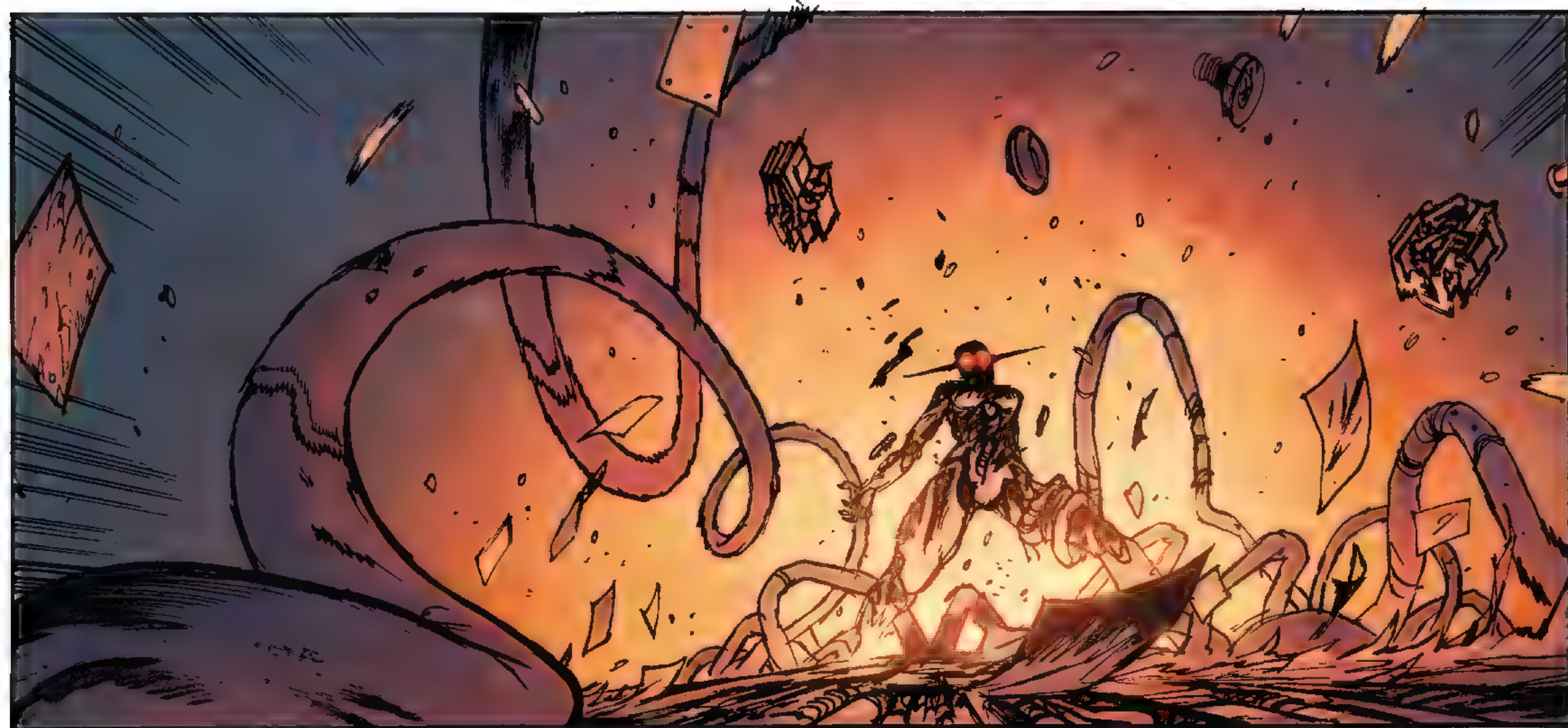
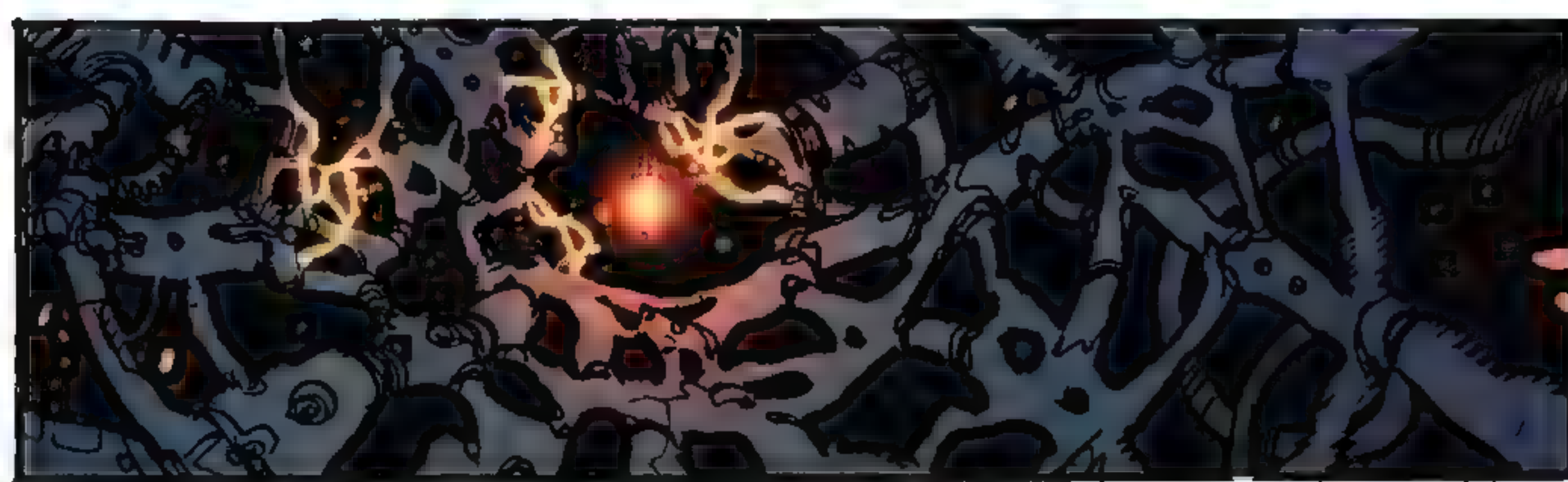
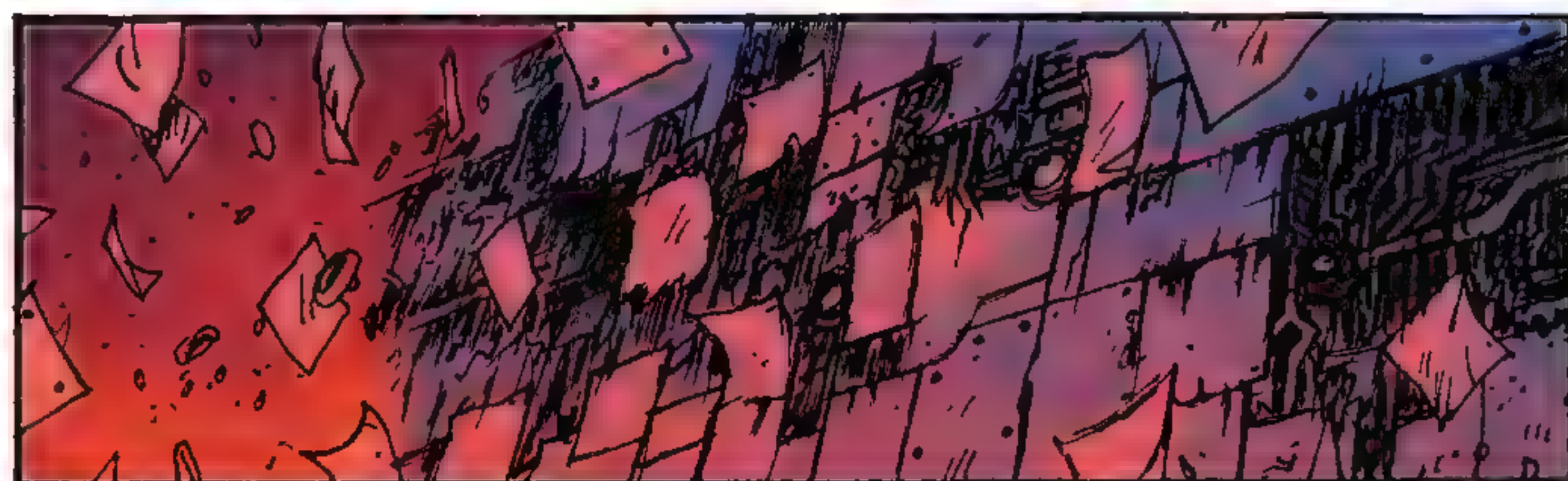
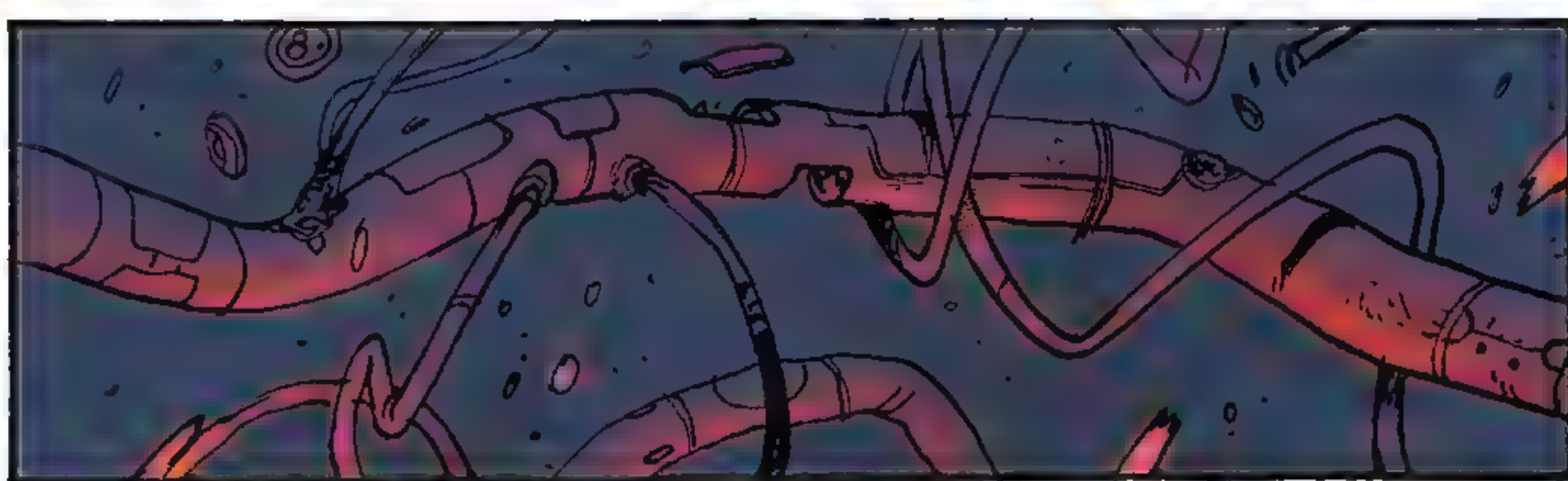
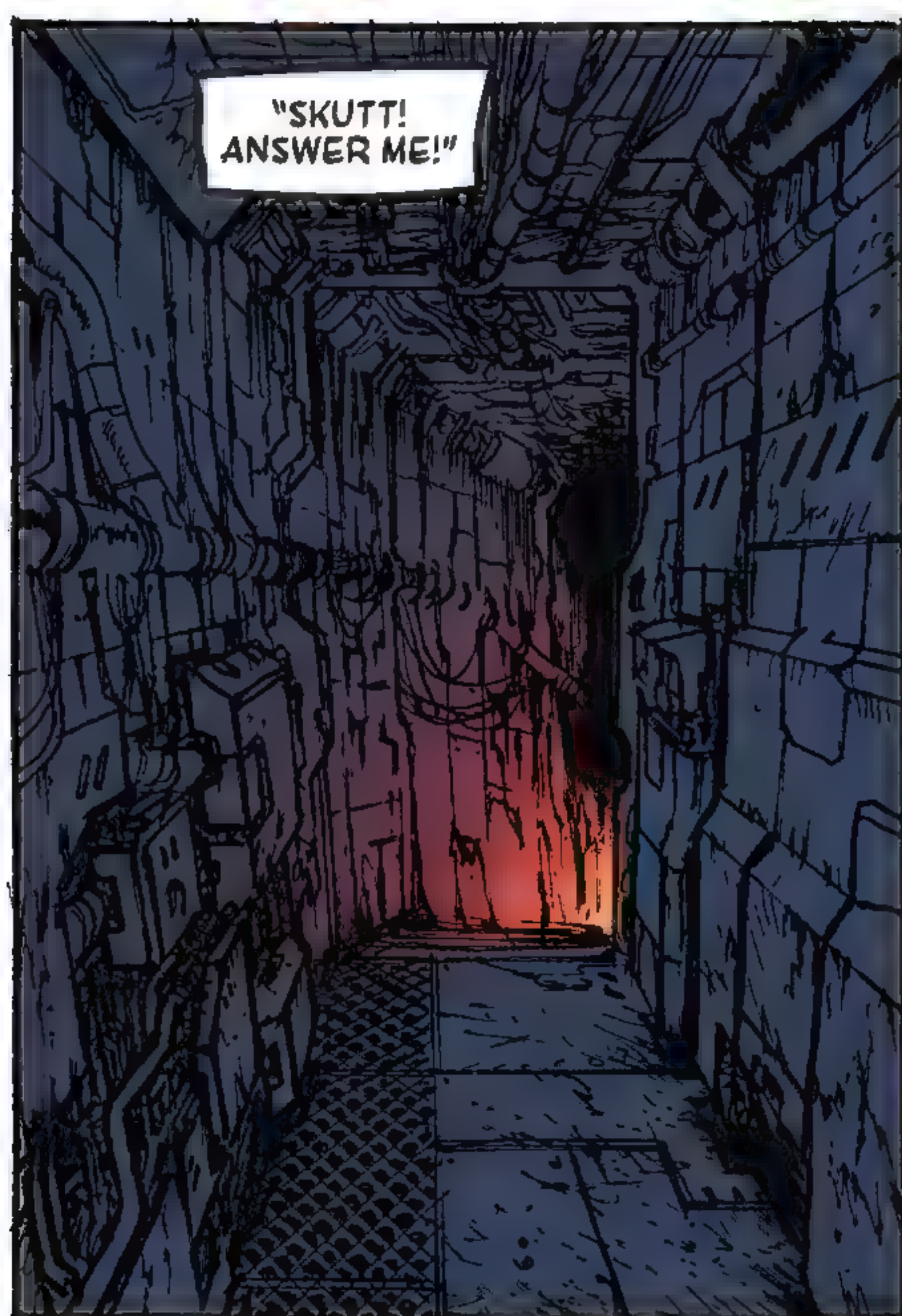
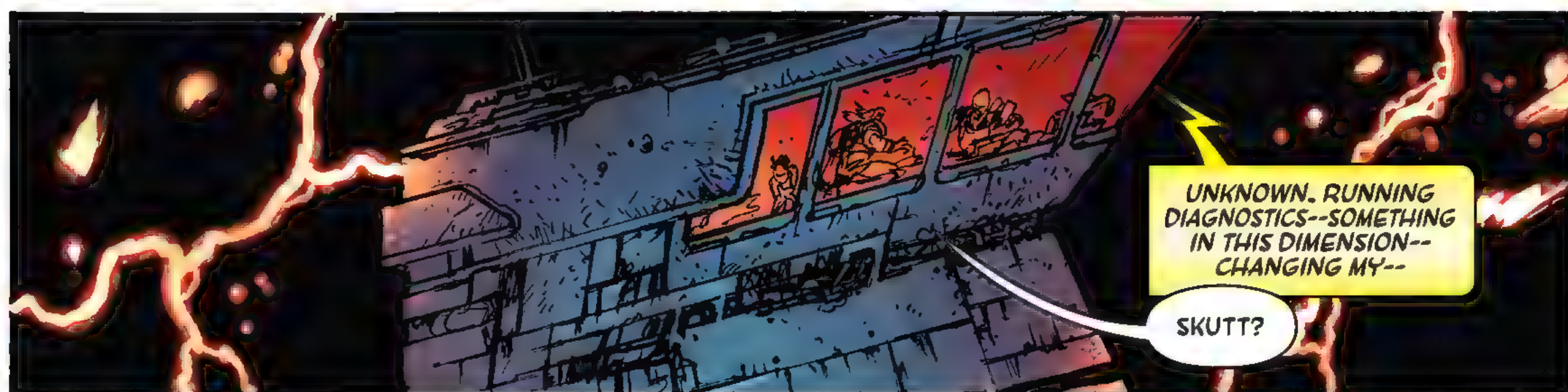
DO WE KNOW
WHAT KIND OF
ATMOSPHERE IS
ON THE OTHER
SIDE?

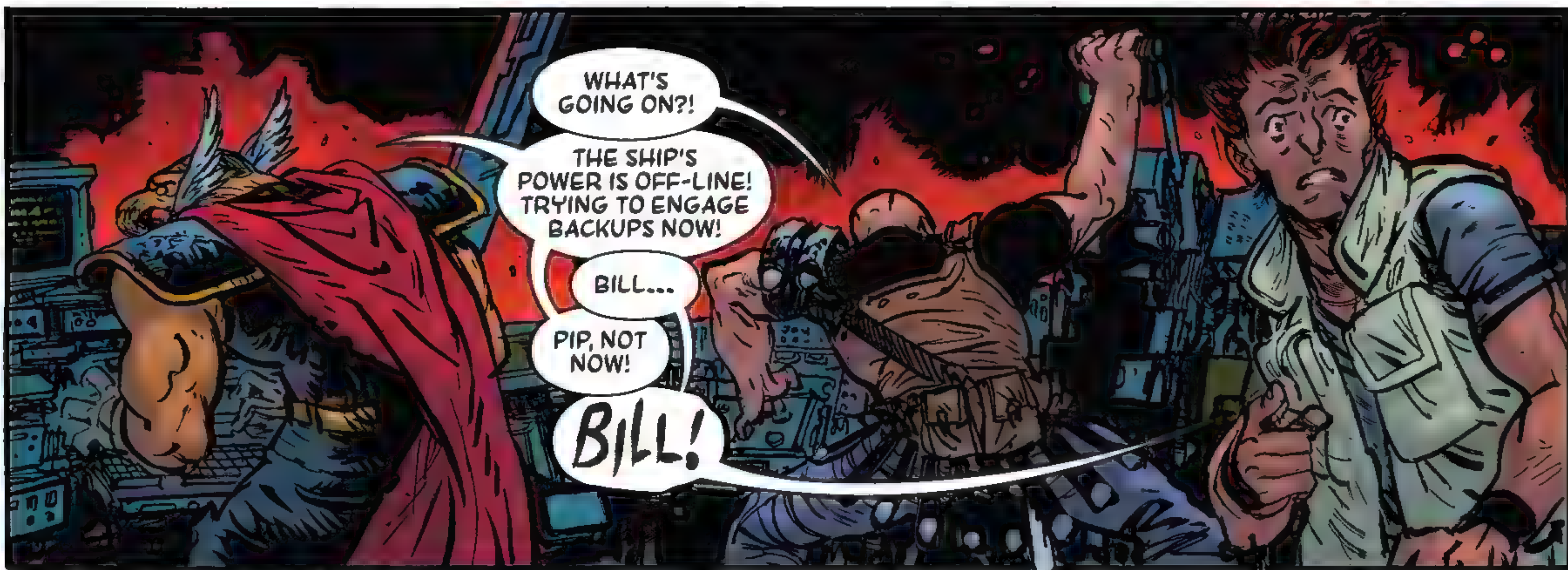
NO READINGS COMING
THROUGH. WE'RE
GOING IN BLIND.

SO BE
IT.

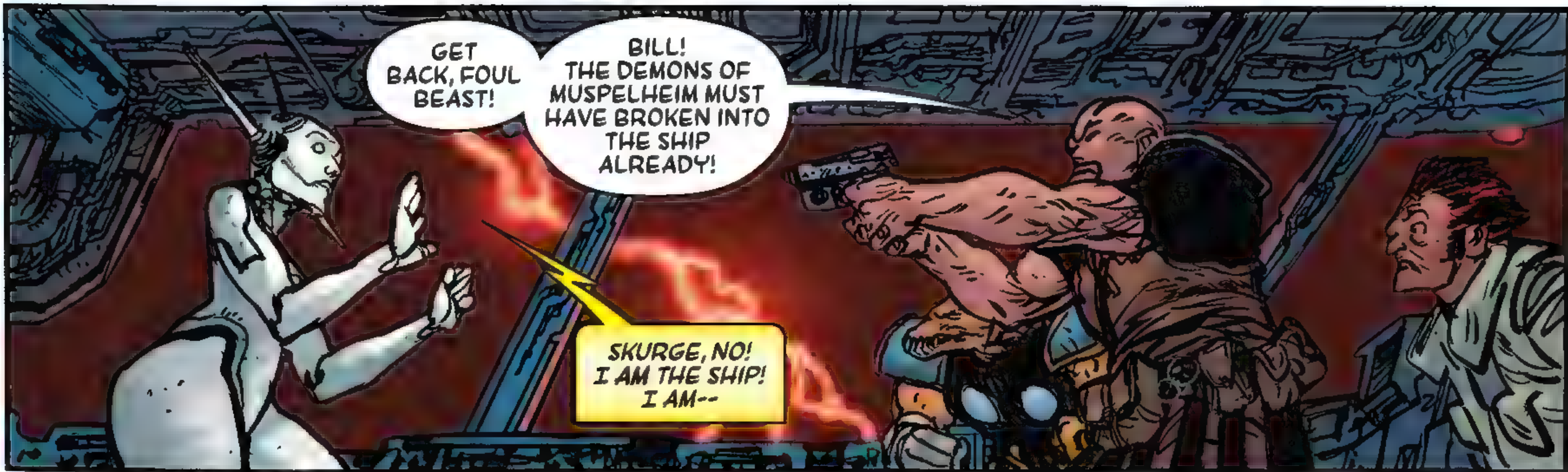
HERE WE COME,
MUSPELHEIM!











GET
BACK, FOUL
BEAST!

BILL!
THE DEMONS OF
MUSPELHEIM MUST
HAVE BROKEN INTO
THE SHIP
ALREADY!

SKURGE, NO!
I AM THE SHIP!
I AM--



...SKUTTLEBUTT.



IT'S ME,
BILL.

BUT...
HOW?



THIS PLACE...
MUSPELHEIM--IT'S
CHANGED ME.

BILL,
YOUR SHIP IS
A LADY?!

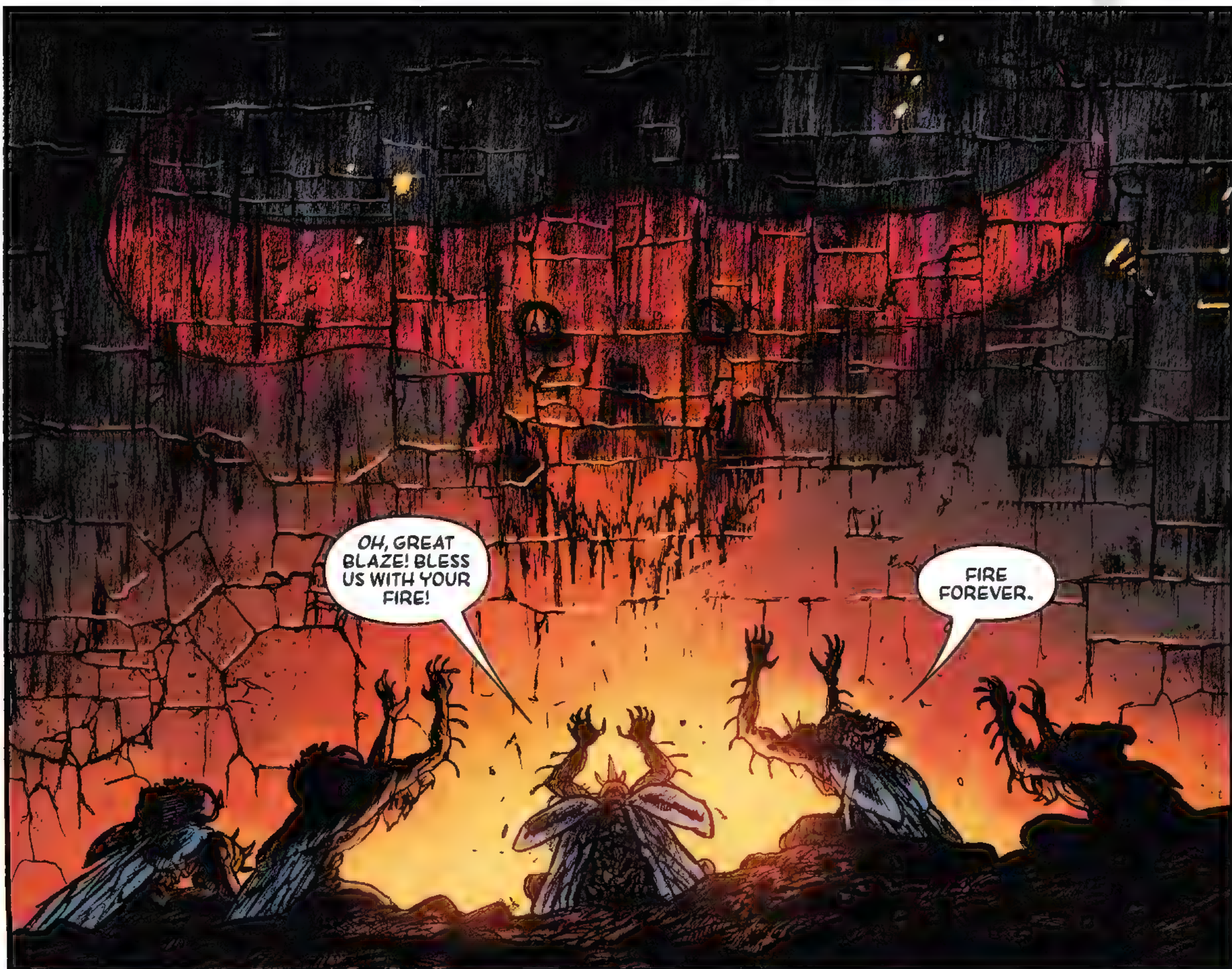


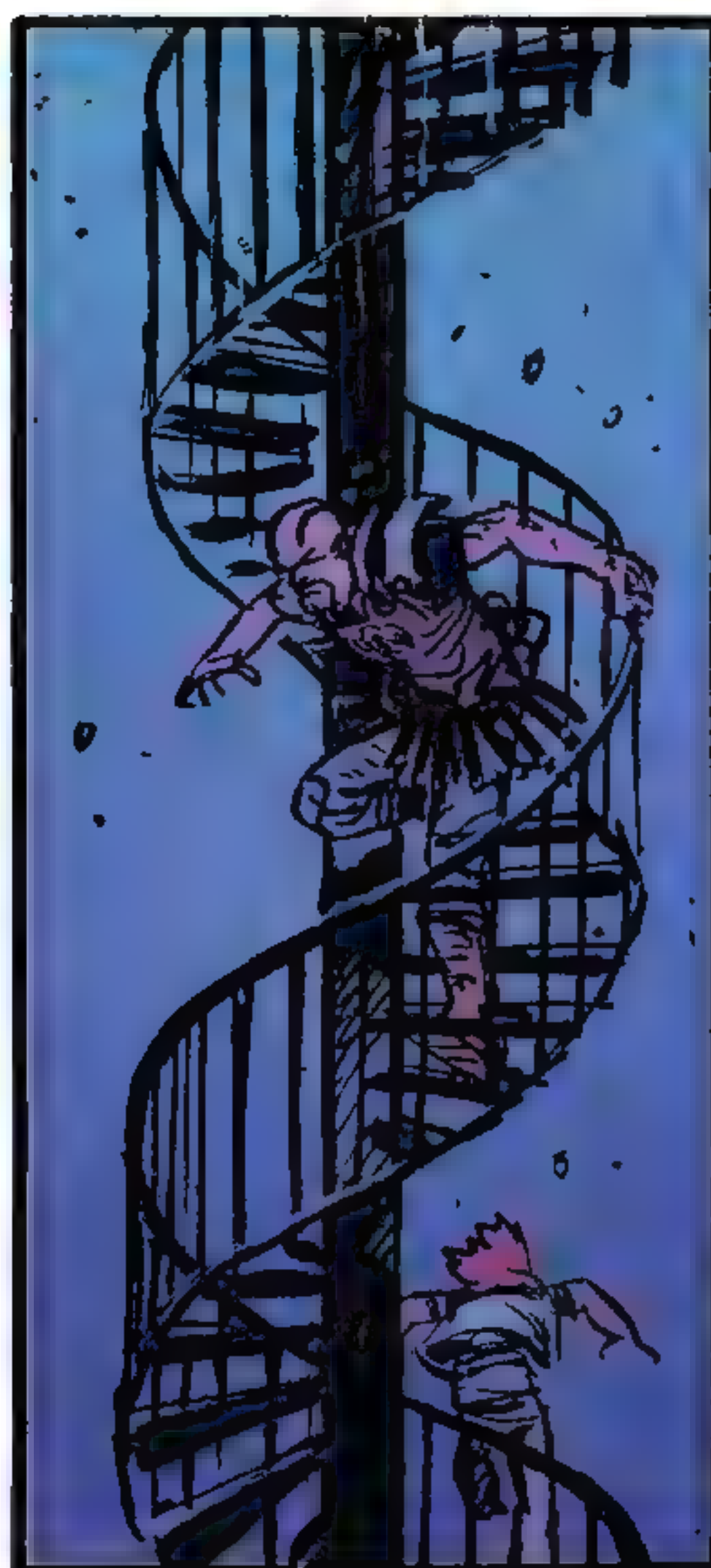
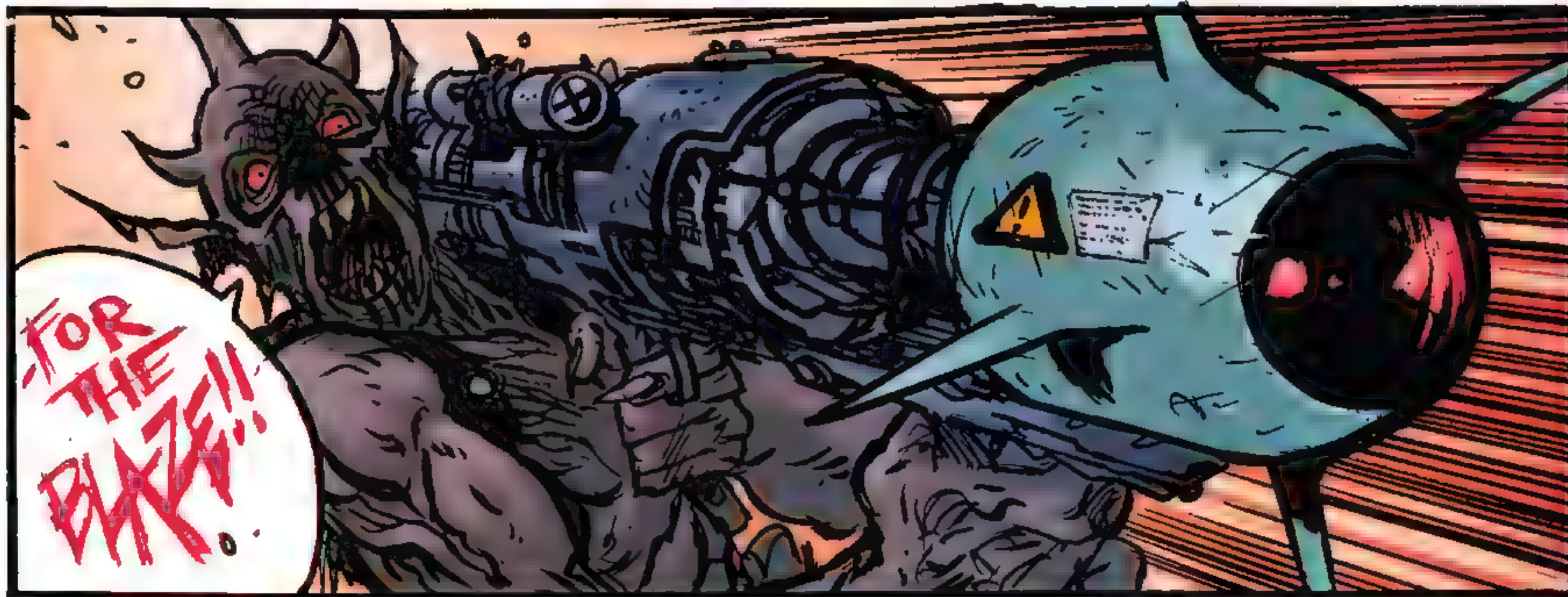
NO! I
MEAN--I'VE
ONLY KNOWN
HER AS THAT!
AS MY SHIP!

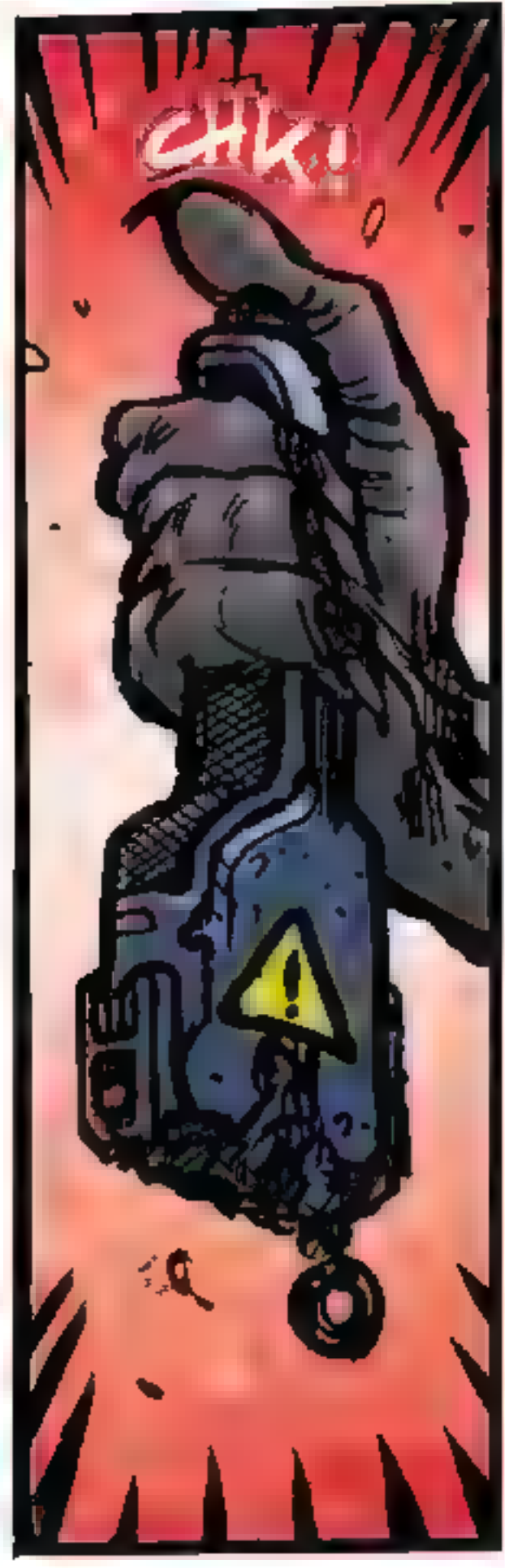
AND I STILL AM!
BUT THAT PORTAL...
SOMETHING ABOUT
THIS DIMENSION...

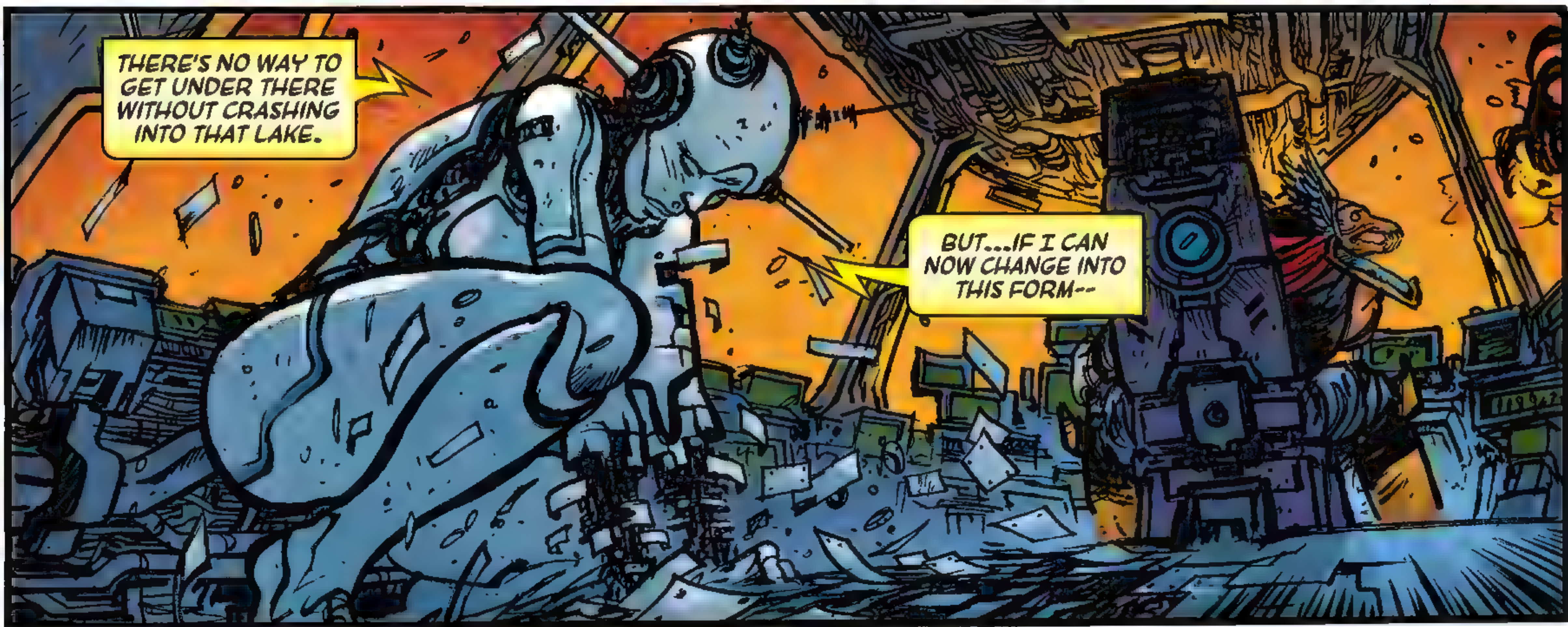
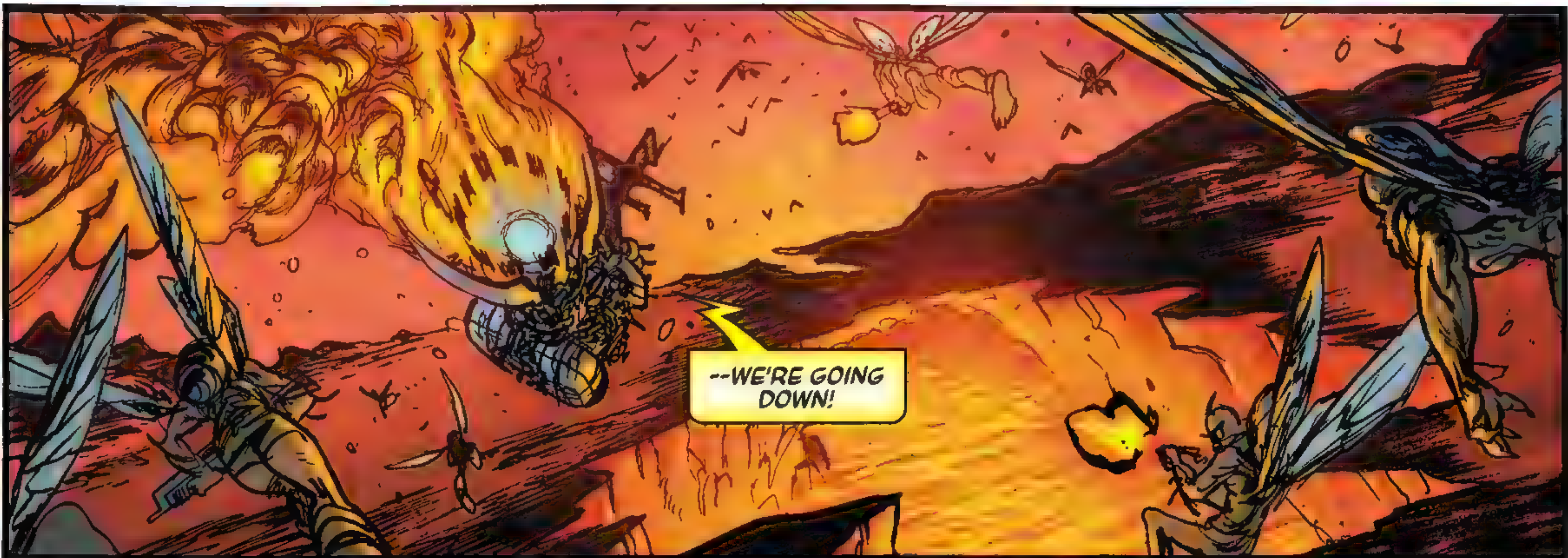
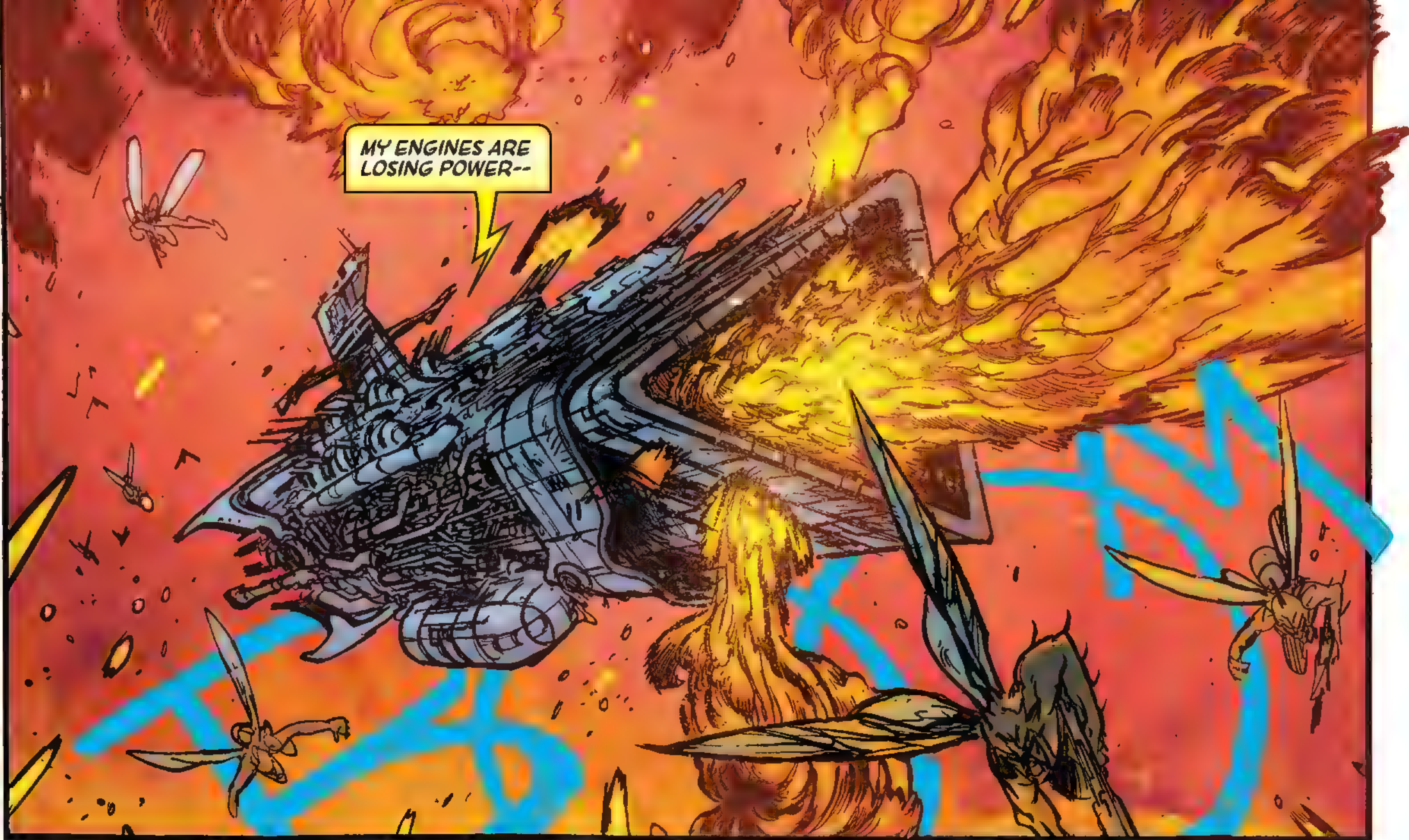


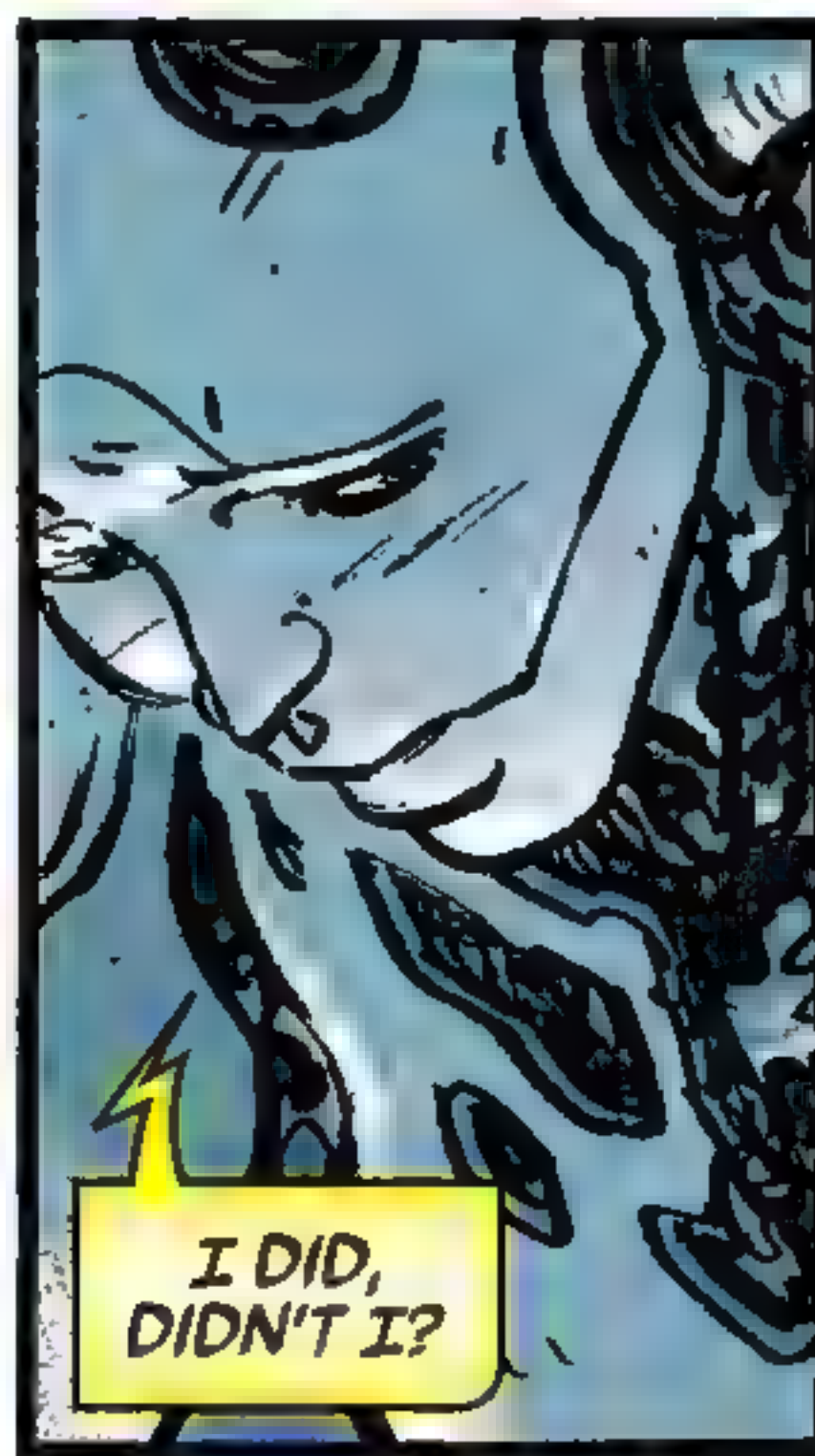
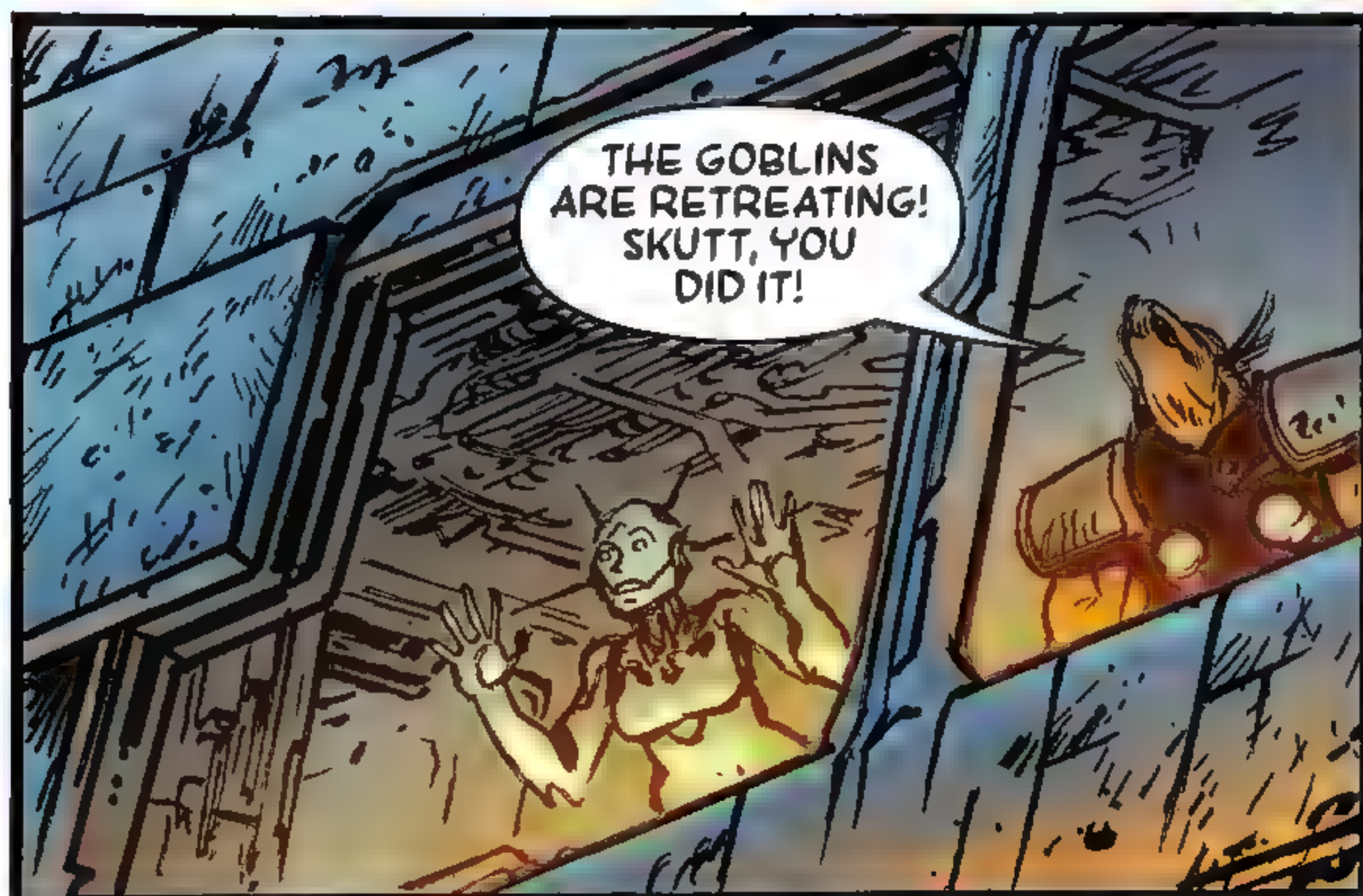
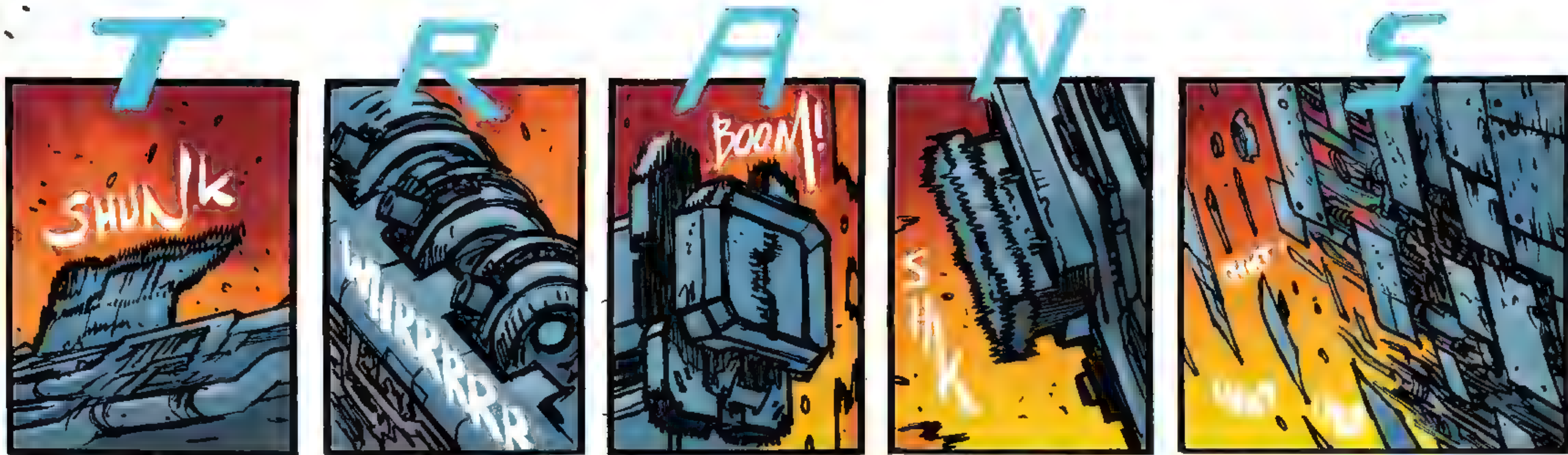
IT'S
AWAKENED ME.

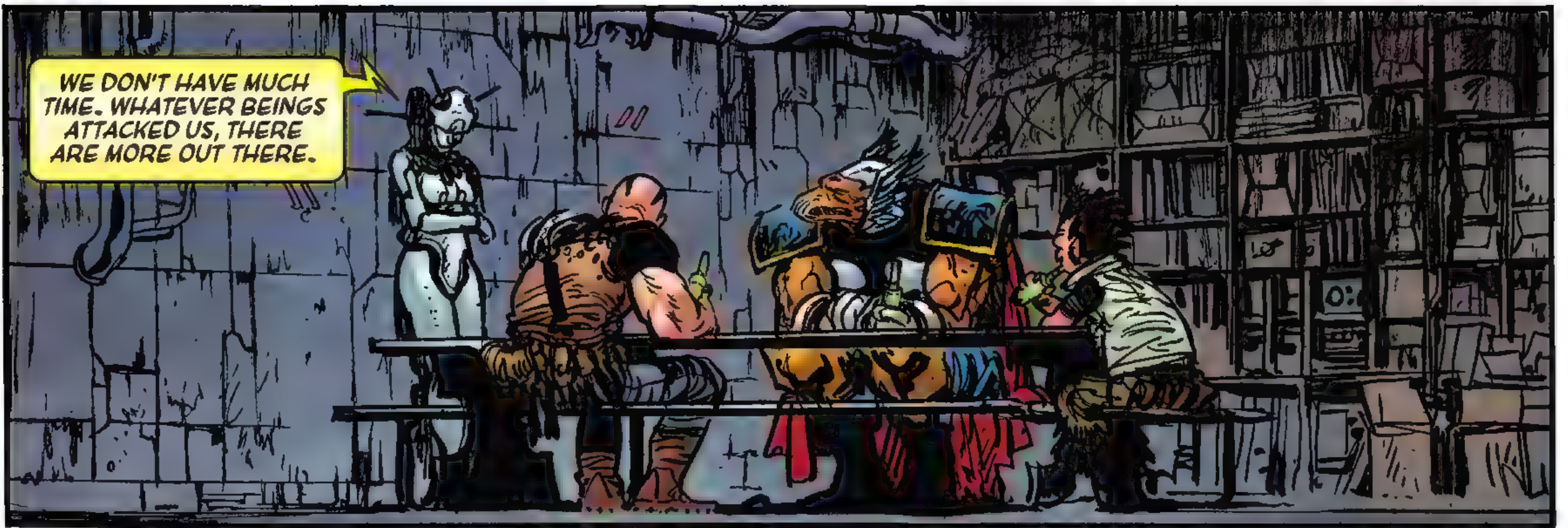




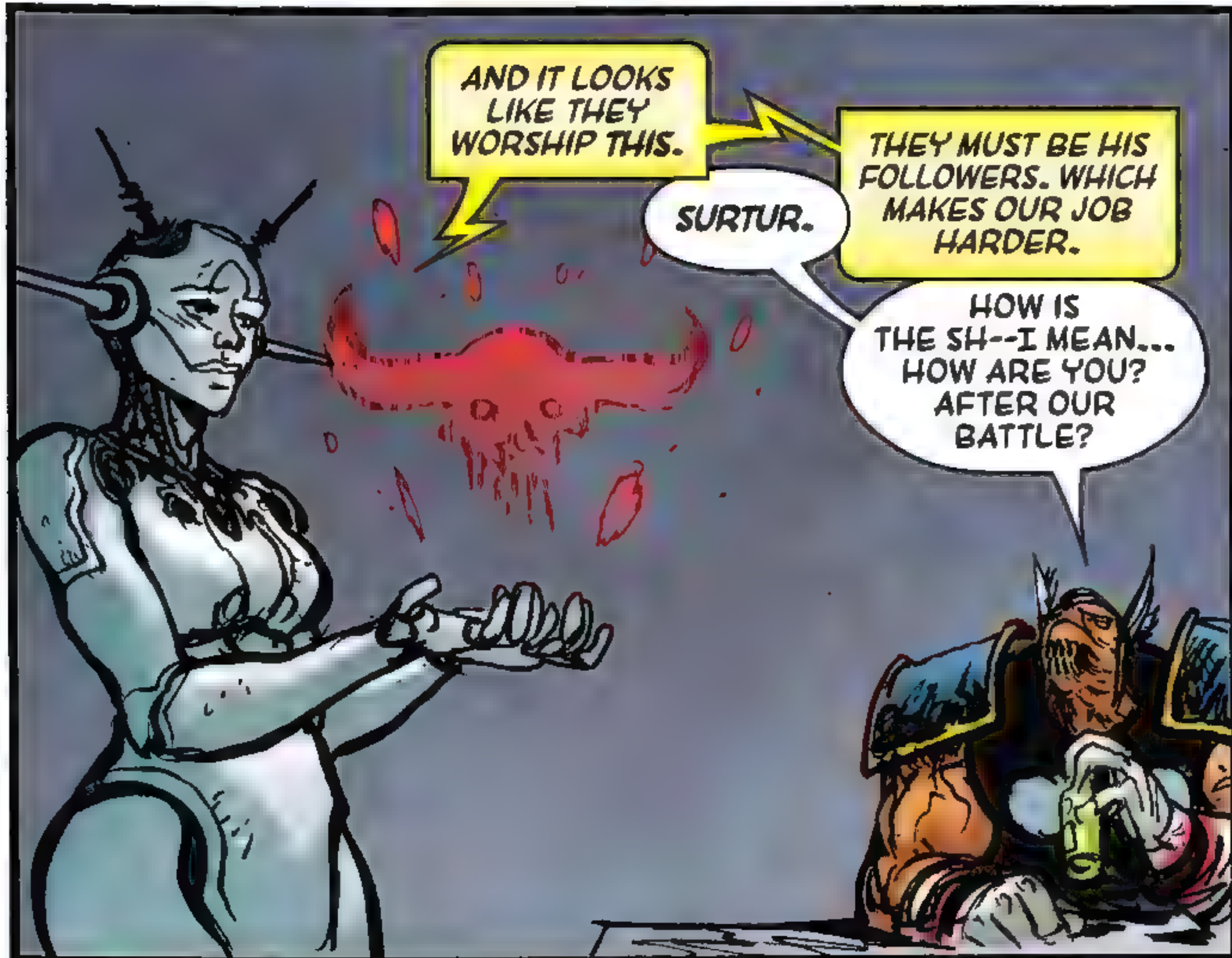








WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME. WHATEVER BEINGS ATTACKED US, THERE ARE MORE OUT THERE.

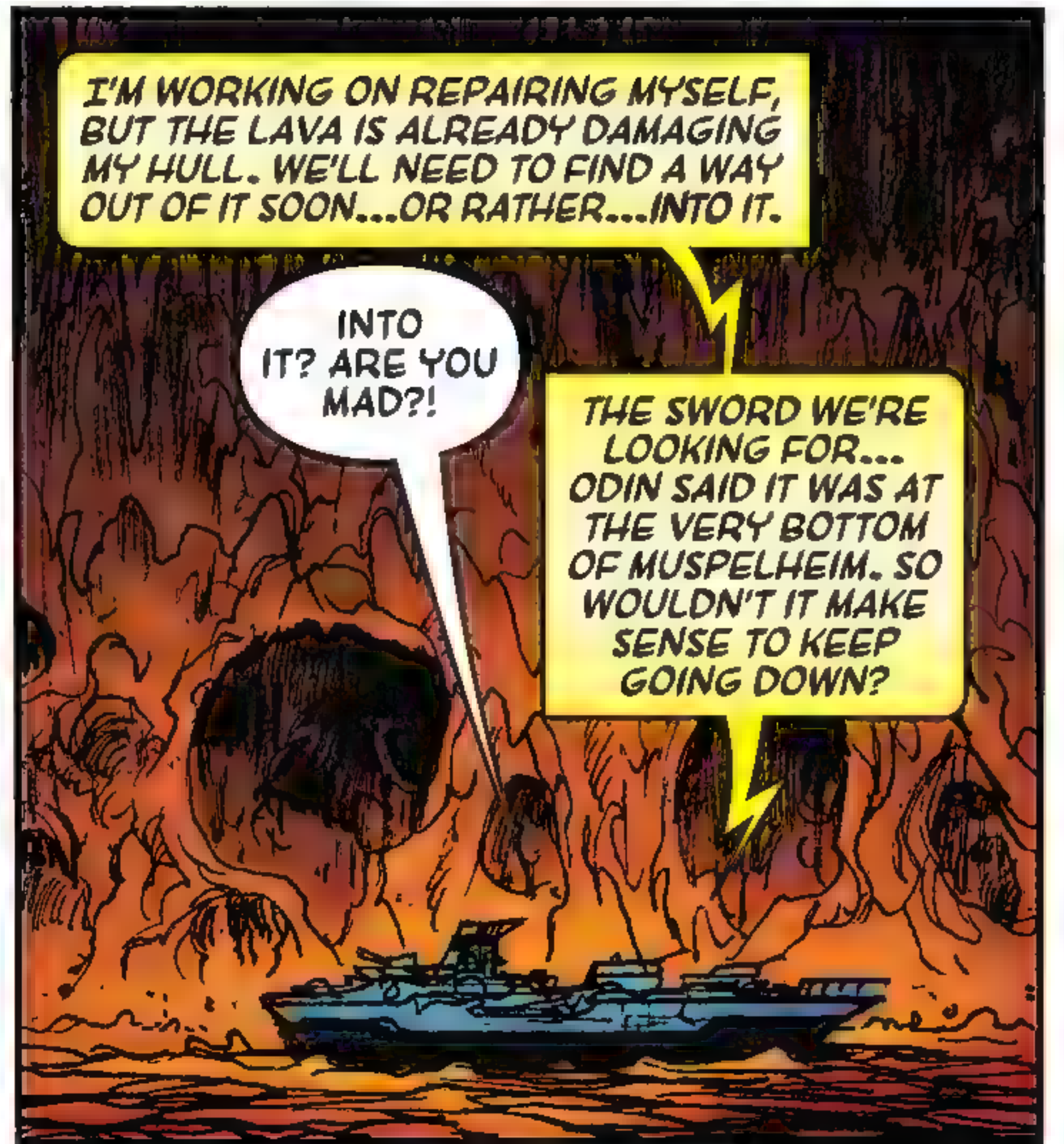


AND IT LOOKS LIKE THEY WORSHIP THIS.

SURTUR.

THEY MUST BE HIS FOLLOWERS. WHICH MAKES OUR JOB HARDER.

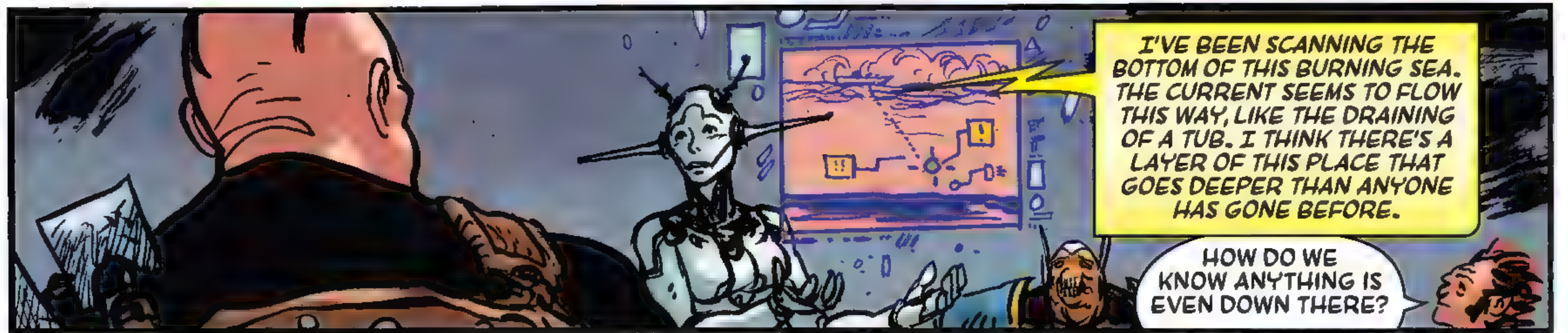
HOW IS THE SH--I MEAN... HOW ARE YOU? AFTER OUR BATTLE?



I'M WORKING ON REPAIRING MYSELF, BUT THE LAVA IS ALREADY DAMAGING MY HULL. WE'LL NEED TO FIND A WAY OUT OF IT SOON...OR RATHER...INTO IT.

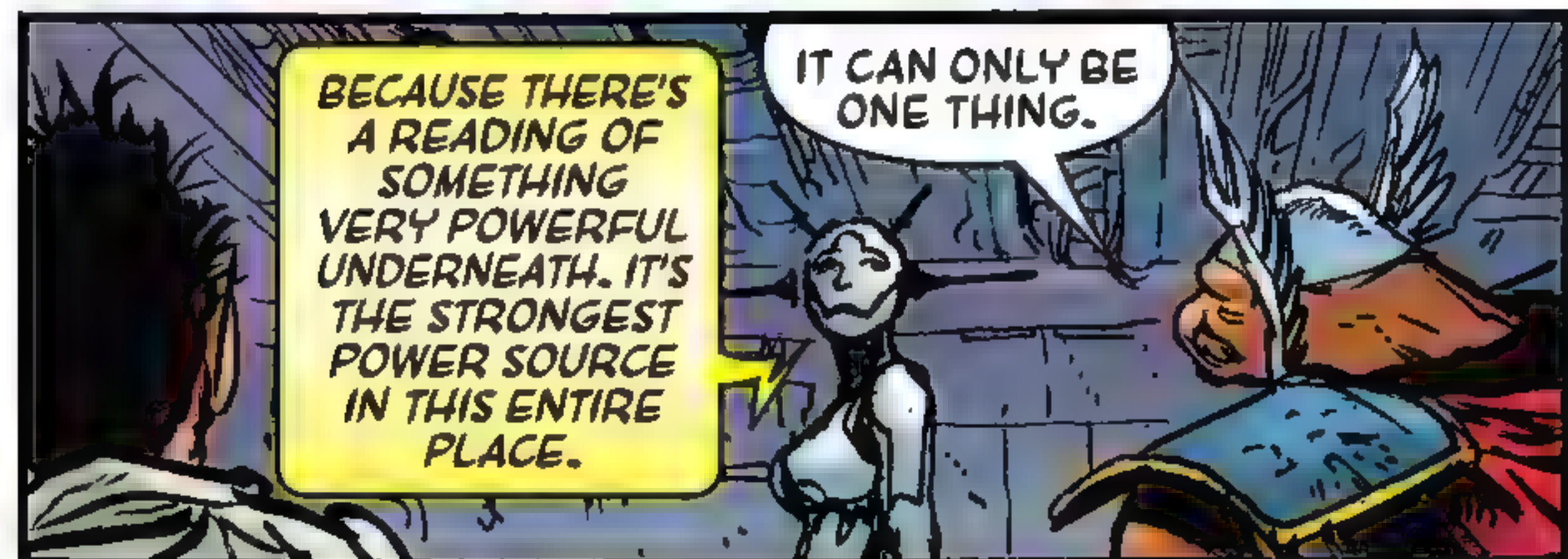
INTO IT? ARE YOU MAD?!

THE SWORD WE'RE LOOKING FOR... ODIN SAID IT WAS AT THE VERY BOTTOM OF MUSPELHEIM. SO WOULDN'T IT MAKE SENSE TO KEEP GOING DOWN?



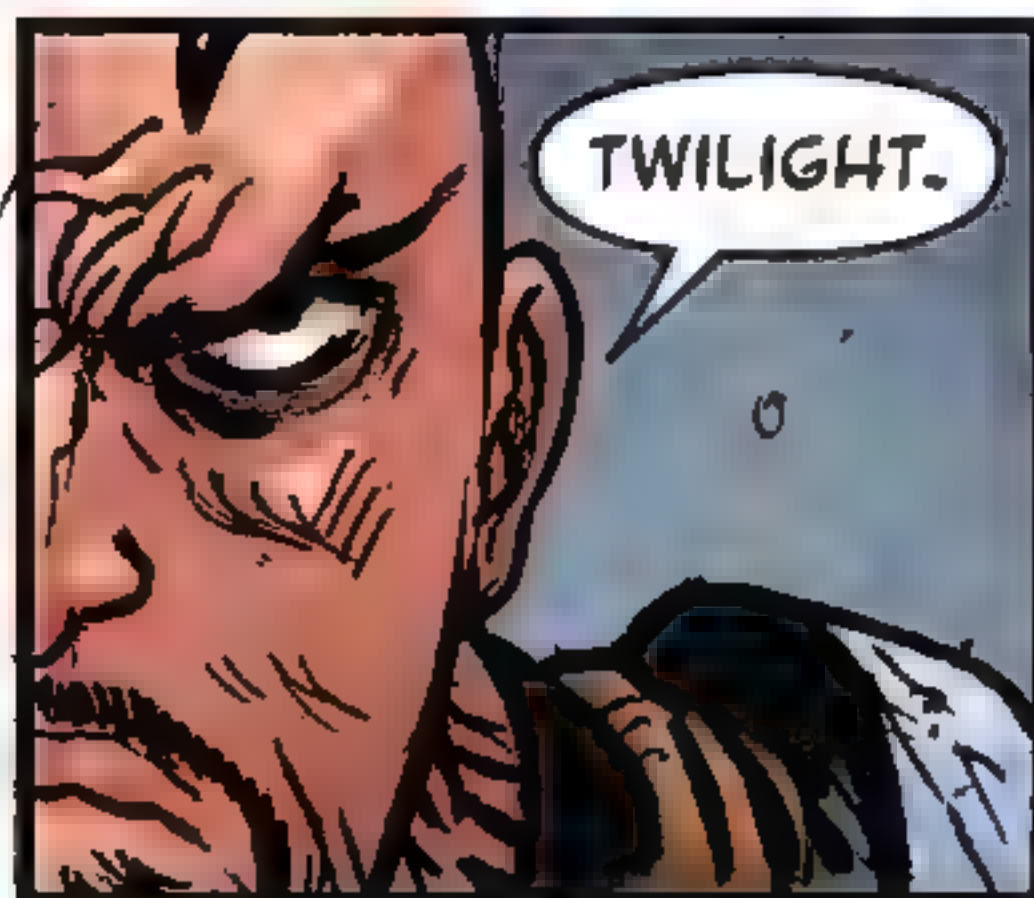
I'VE BEEN SCANNING THE BOTTOM OF THIS BURNING SEA. THE CURRENT SEEMS TO FLOW THIS WAY, LIKE THE DRAINING OF A TUB. I THINK THERE'S A LAYER OF THIS PLACE THAT GOES DEEPER THAN ANYONE HAS GONE BEFORE.

HOW DO WE KNOW ANYTHING IS EVEN DOWN THERE?



BECAUSE THERE'S A READING OF SOMETHING VERY POWERFUL UNDERNEATH. IT'S THE STRONGEST POWER SOURCE IN THIS ENTIRE PLACE.

IT CAN ONLY BE ONE THING.



TWILIGHT.

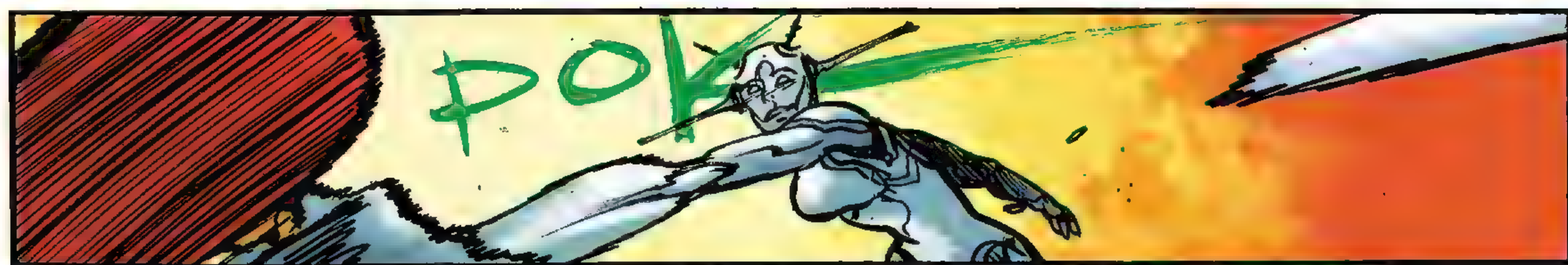
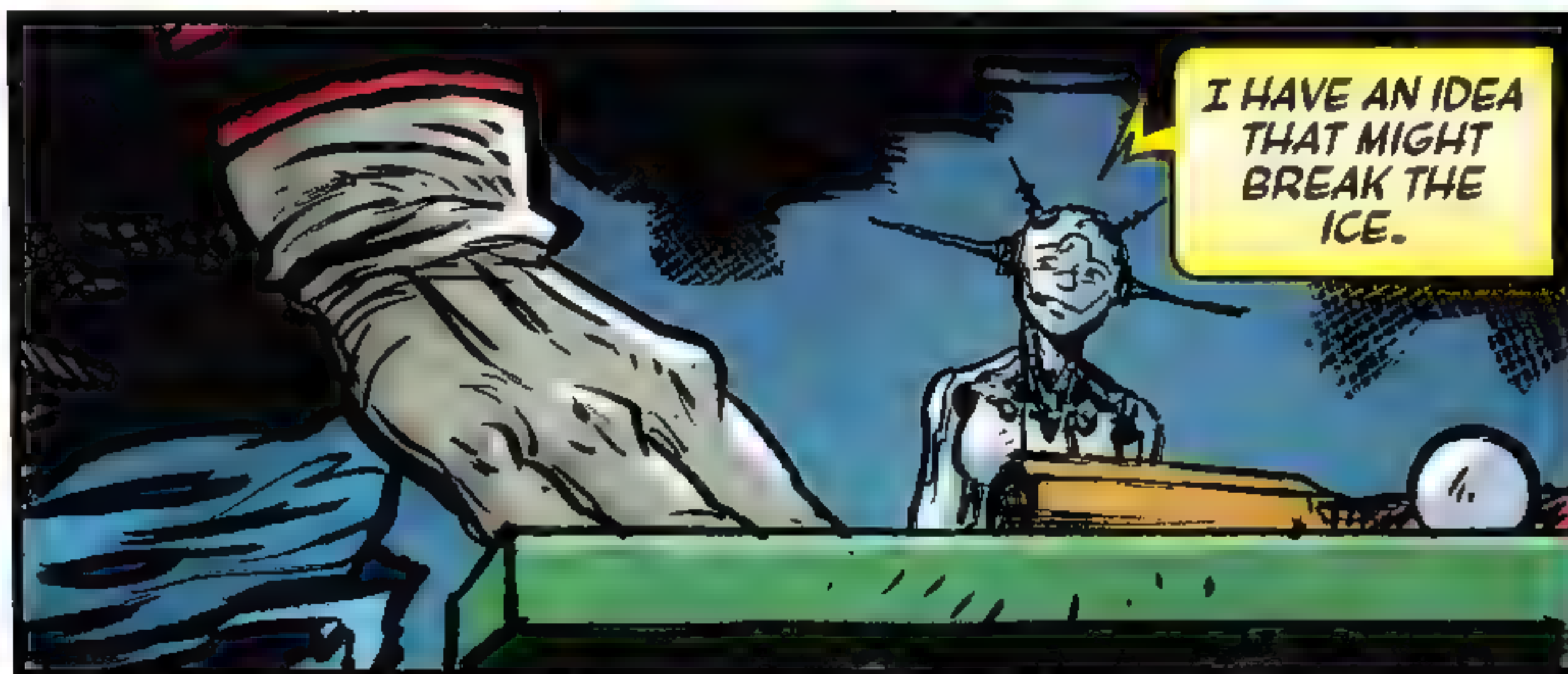
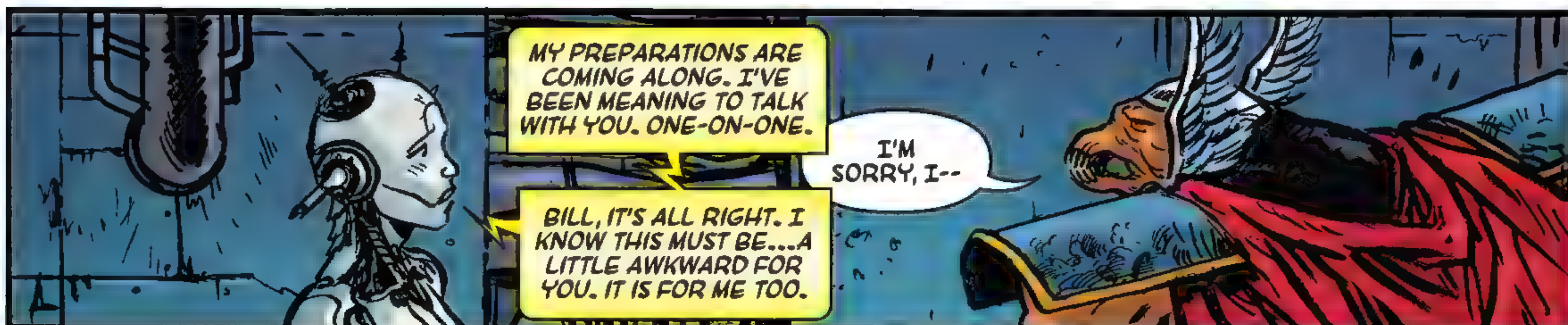
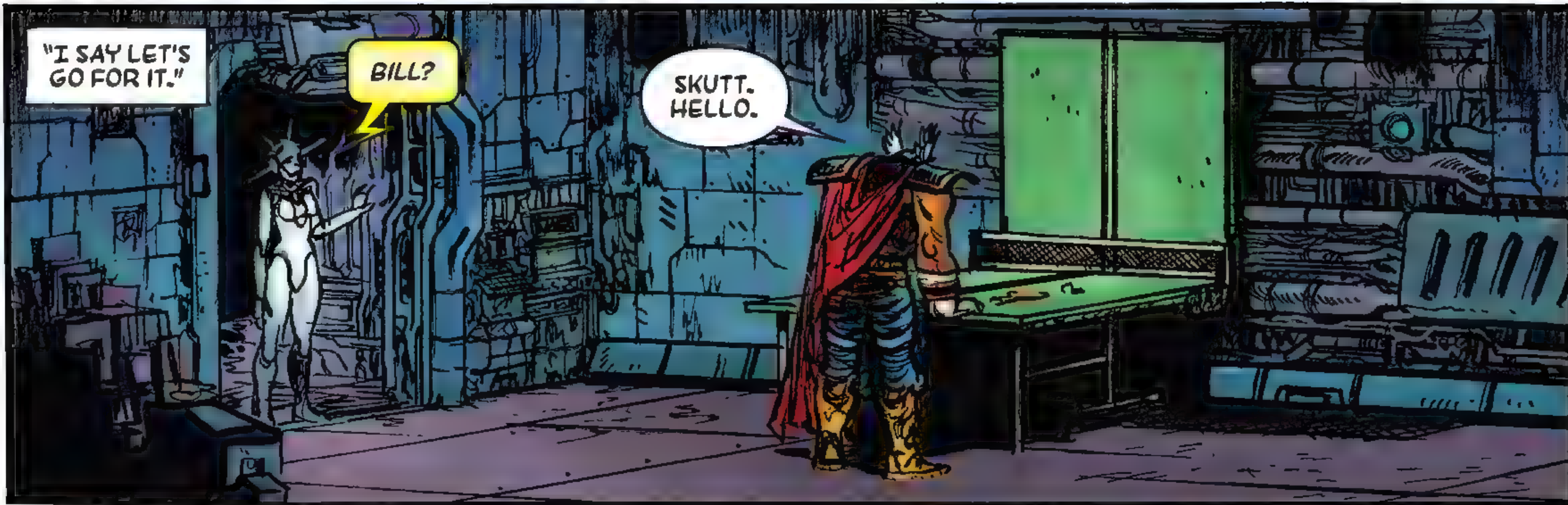
I'M REARRANGING MY HULL STRUCTURE AS FAST AS I CAN TO COMPENSATE FOR THE INTENSE HEAT.



I WAS PLANNING TO CONTINUE TRAVELING ON THE SURFACE OF THE BURNING SEA UNTIL WE ARE DIRECTLY OVER THE OPENING. THIS WAY I CAN SPEND AS LITTLE TIME AS POSSIBLE SUBMERGED.

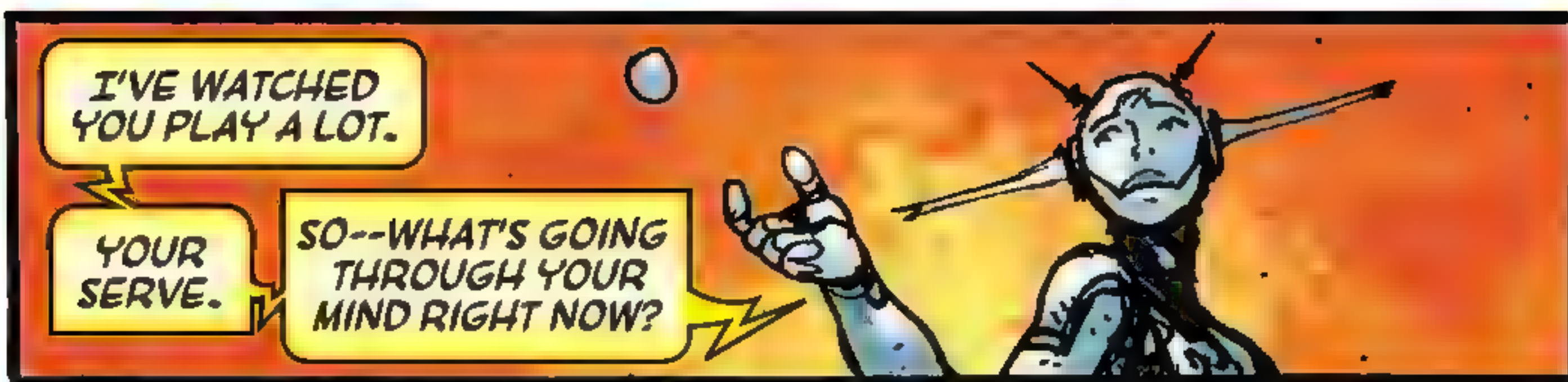
BILL, WHAT DO YOU THINK?

...WHATEVER GETS ME TO THAT SWORD THE FASTEST.





WOW.
YOU'RE NOT
BAD.



I'VE WATCHED
YOU PLAY A LOT.

YOUR
SERVE.

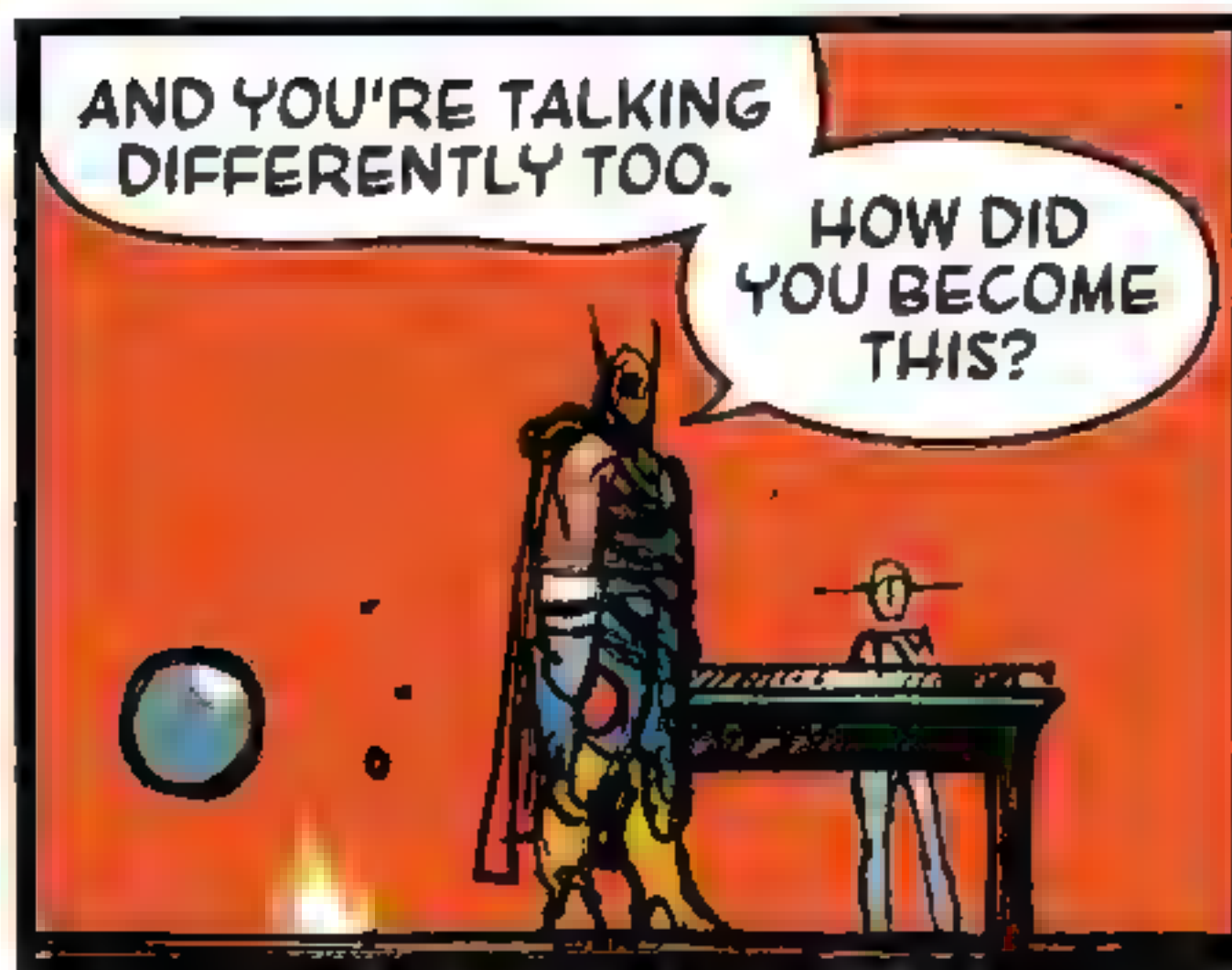
SO--WHAT'S GOING
THROUGH YOUR
MIND RIGHT NOW?



IT'S
JUST...MY
WHOLE LIFE,
YOU'VE ONLY BEEN
PIECES OF METAL
AND A VOICE THAT
EXISTS IN THE
ETHER AROUND
ME.



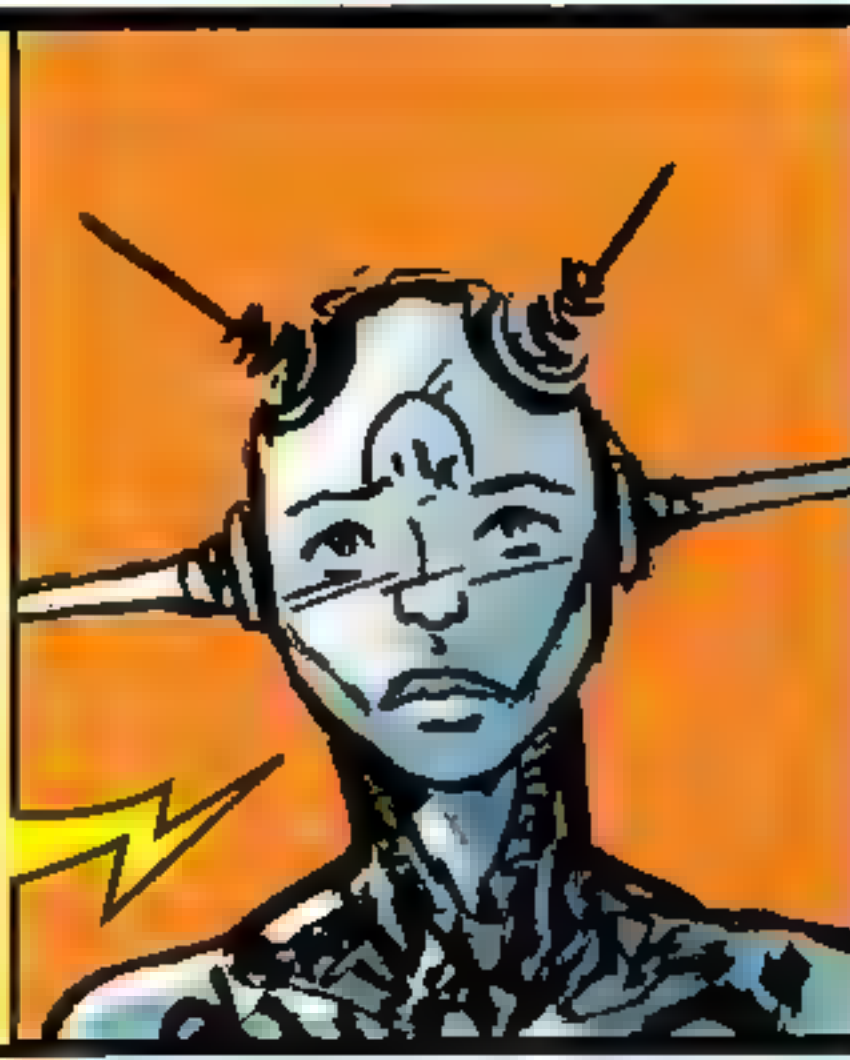
AND NOW...
HERE YOU ARE.
IN THE FLESH.
OR STEEL.



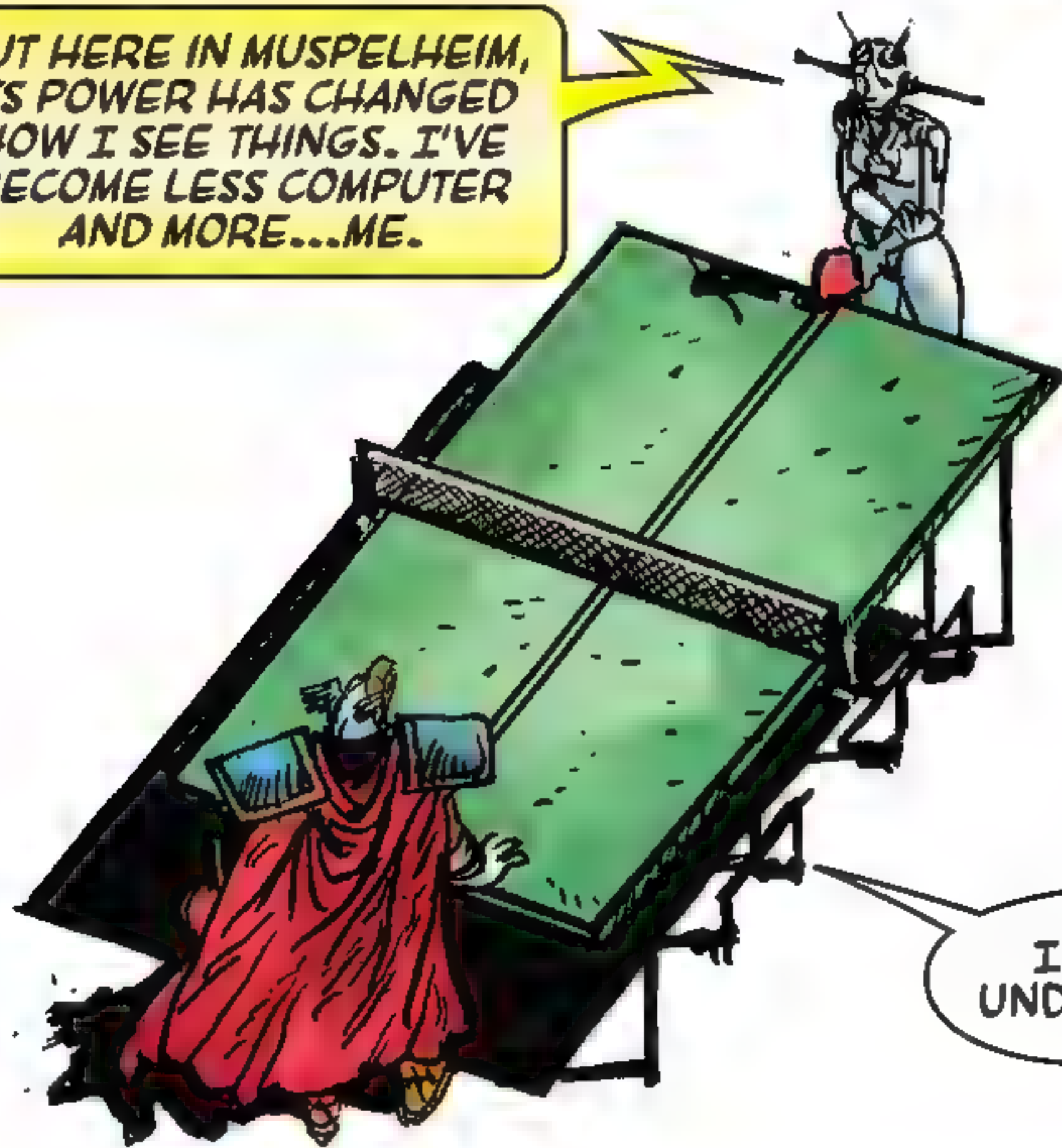
AND YOU'RE TALKING
DIFFERENTLY TOO.

HOW DID
YOU BECOME
THIS?

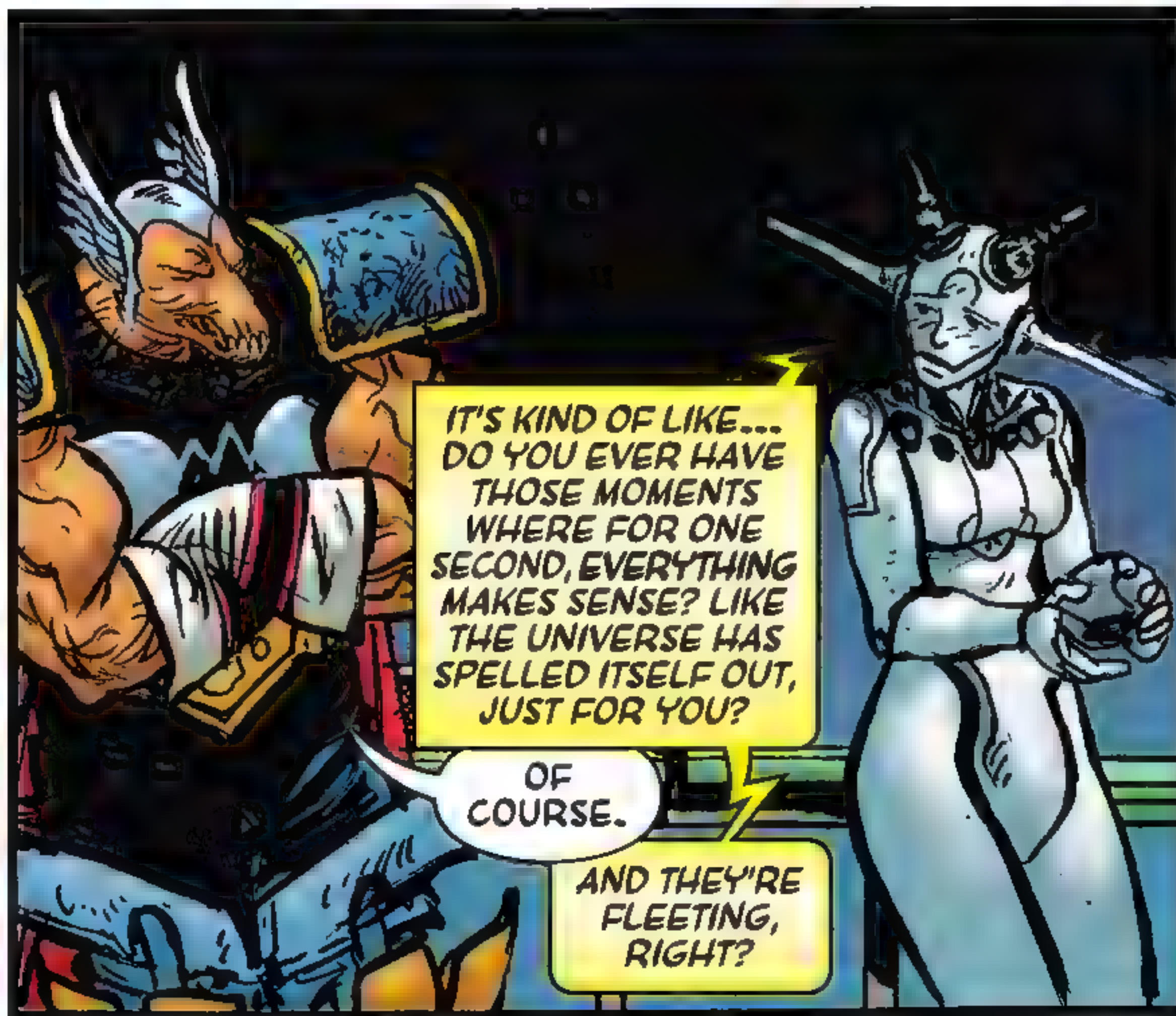
I WISH I KNEW.
EVER SINCE WE MET
THOR AND ODIN, MY
TECHNOLOGY HAS
BEEN FORCED TO
MARRY WITH THE
MAGIC OF THE GODS,
AND THERE WAS
NO ISSUE WITH MY
PROGRAMMING--
THEY'VE ALWAYS
COEXISTED
PERFECTLY FINE.



BUT HERE IN MUSPELHEIM,
ITS POWER HAS CHANGED
HOW I SEE THINGS. I'VE
BECOME LESS COMPUTER
AND MORE...ME.



I DO NOT
UNDERSTAND.



IT'S KIND OF LIKE...
DO YOU EVER HAVE
THOSE MOMENTS
WHERE FOR ONE
SECOND, EVERYTHING
MAKES SENSE? LIKE
THE UNIVERSE HAS
SPELLED ITSELF OUT,
JUST FOR YOU?

OF
COURSE.

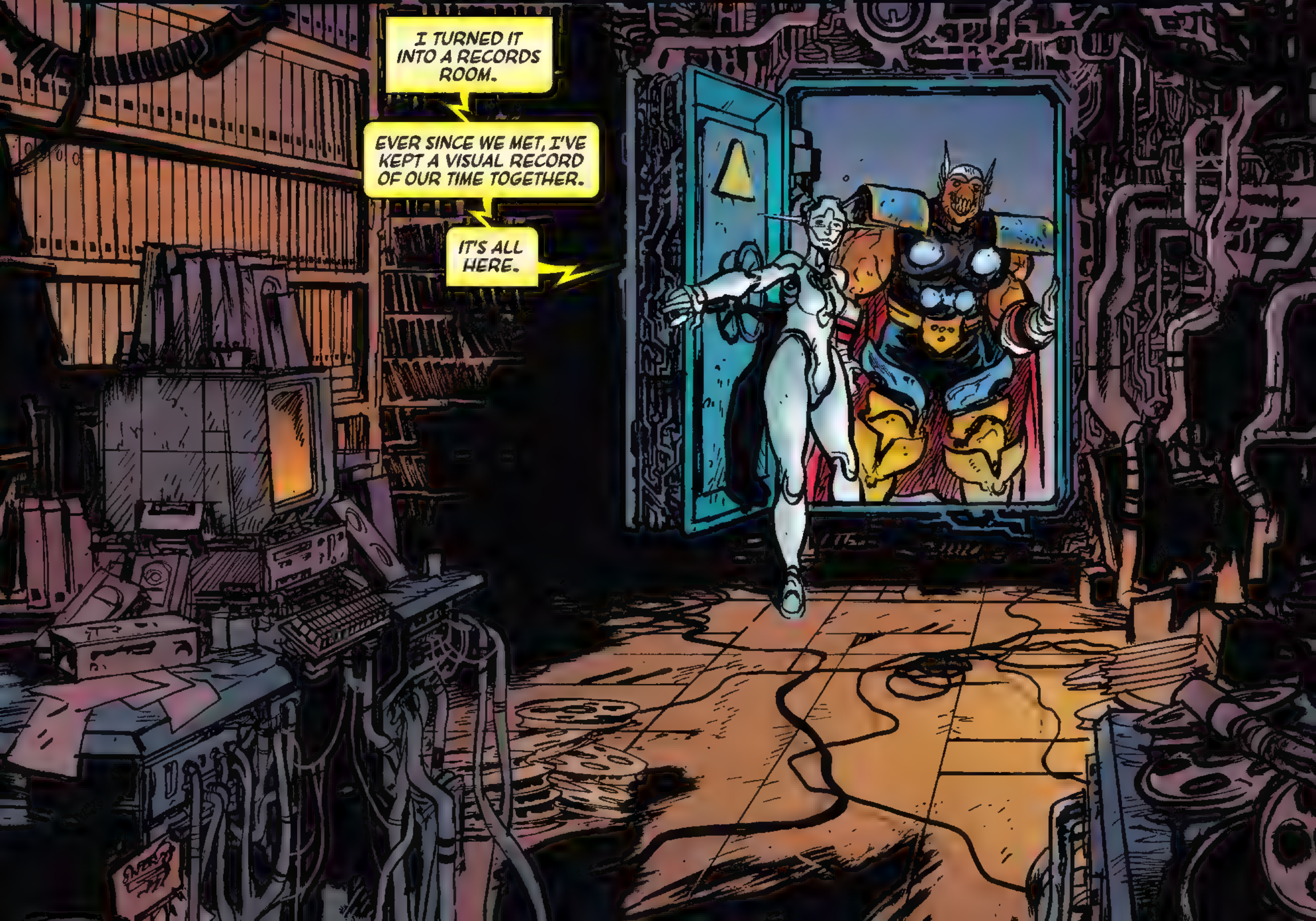
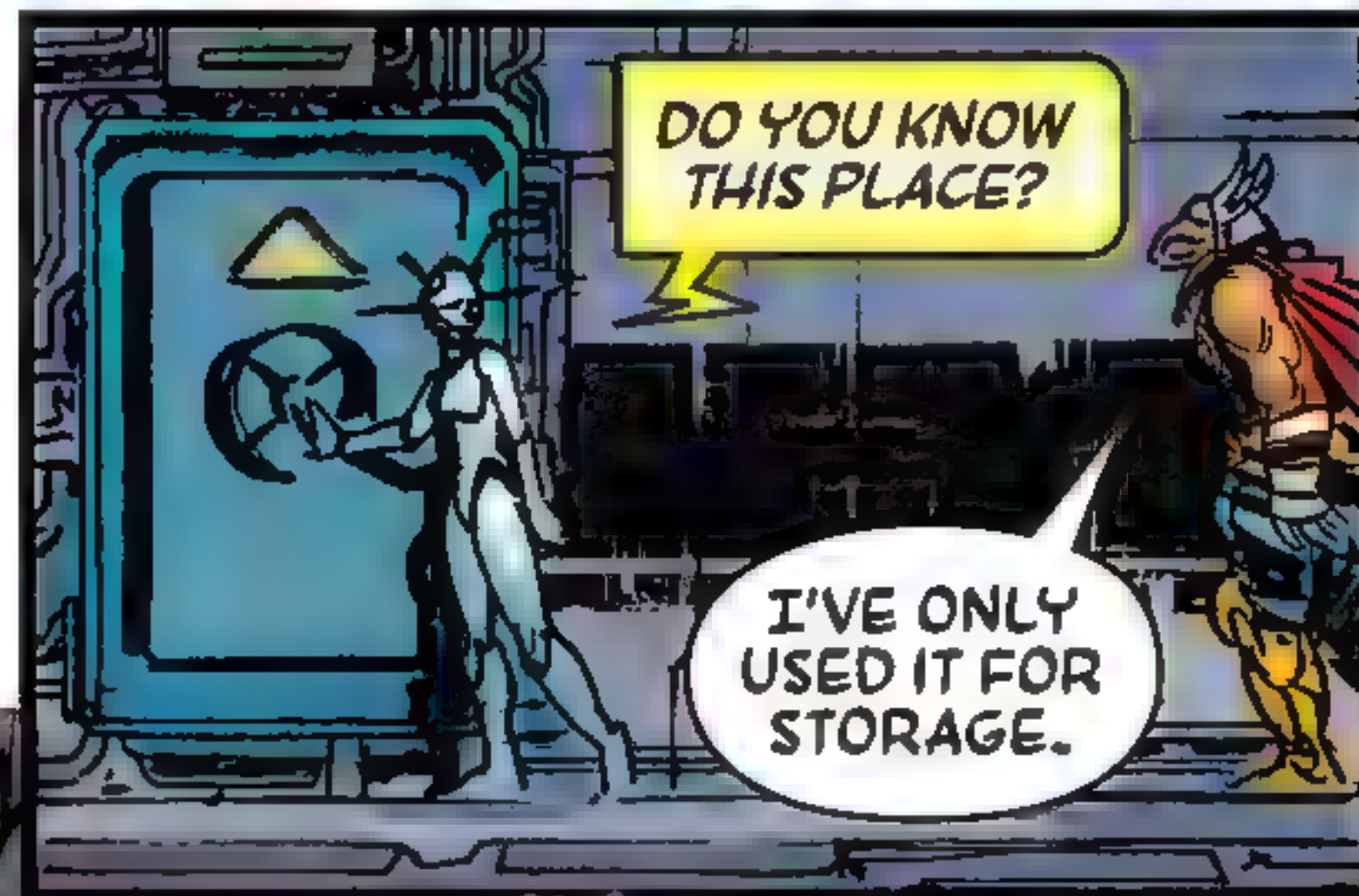
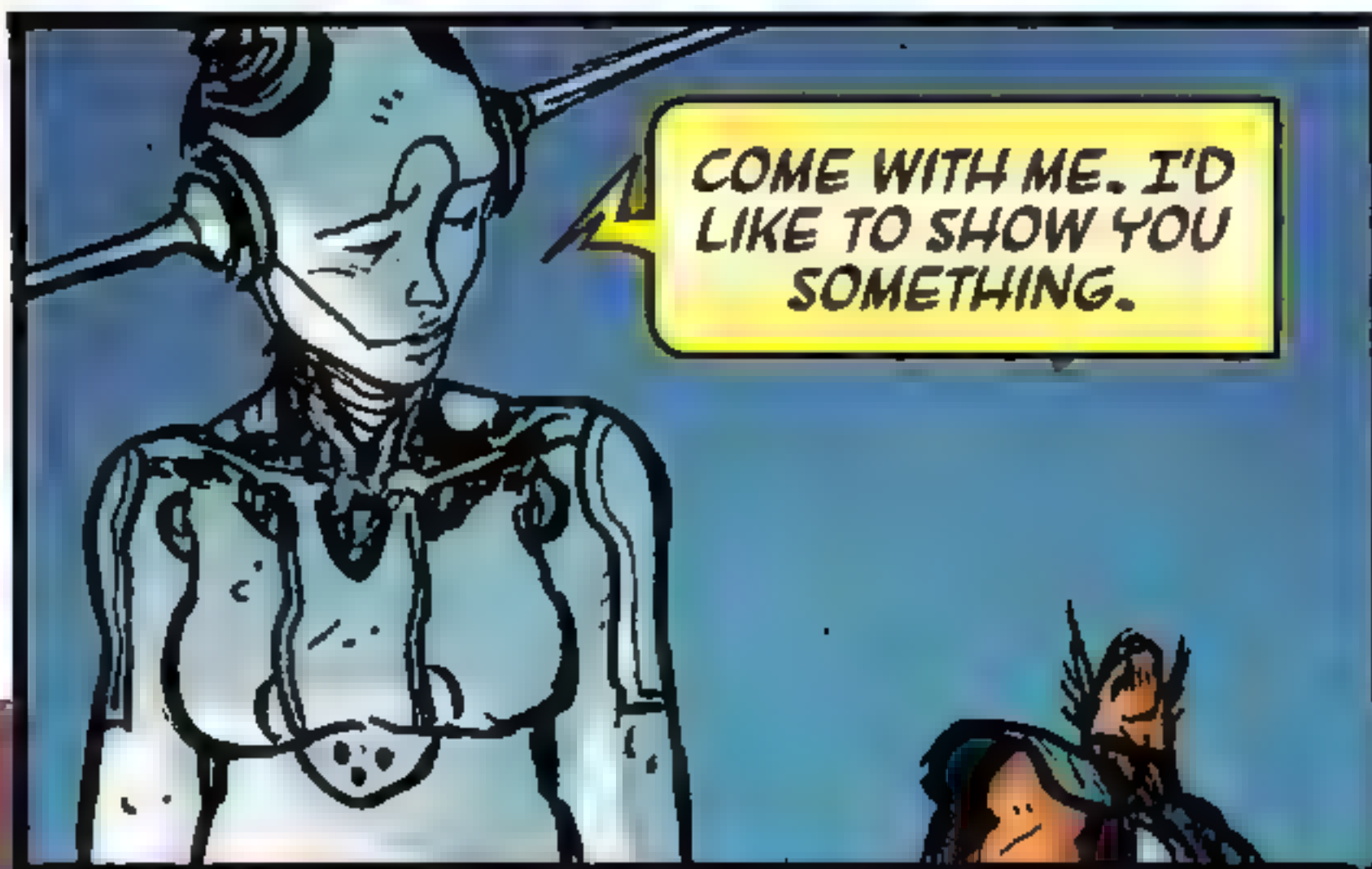
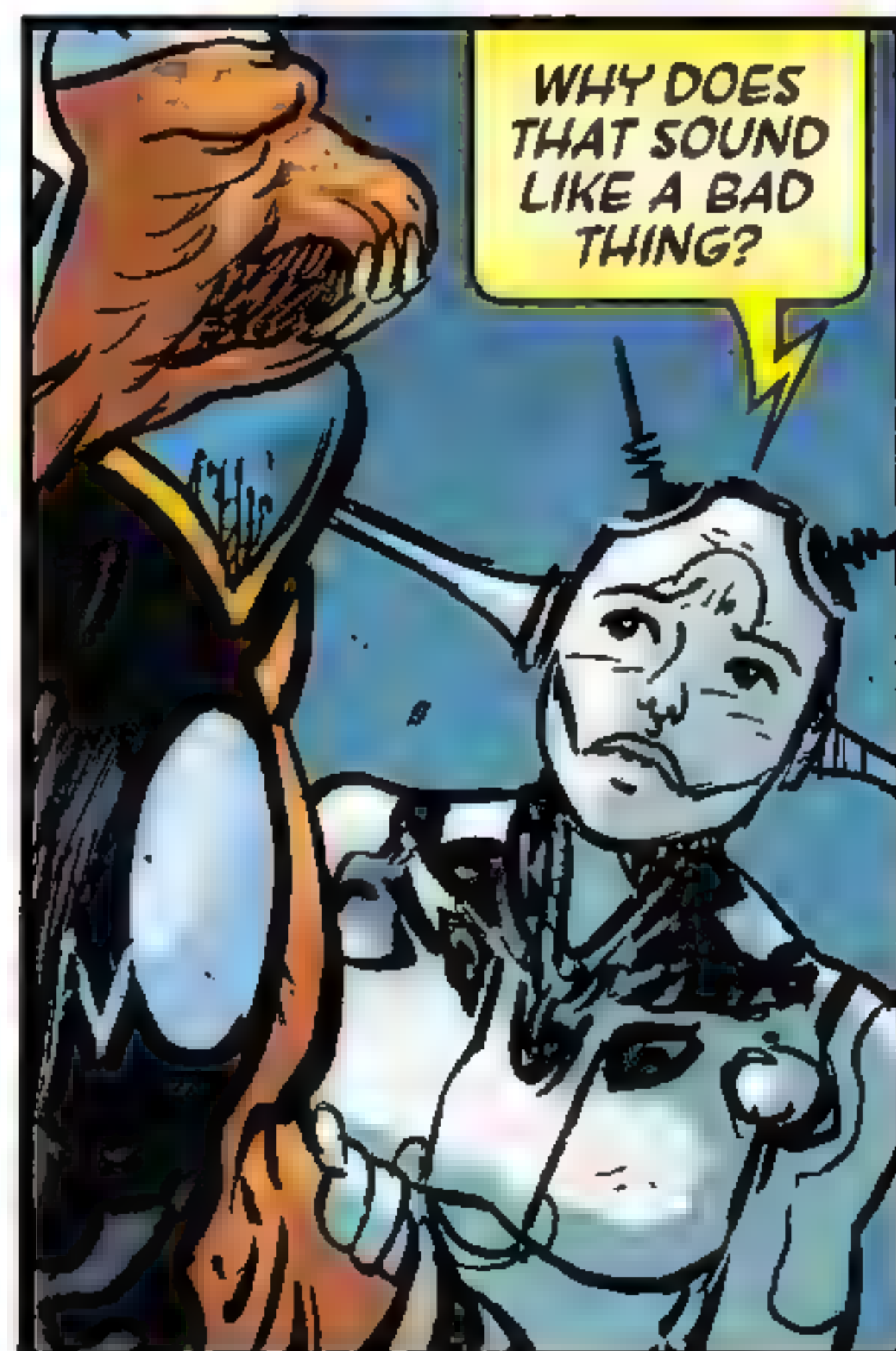
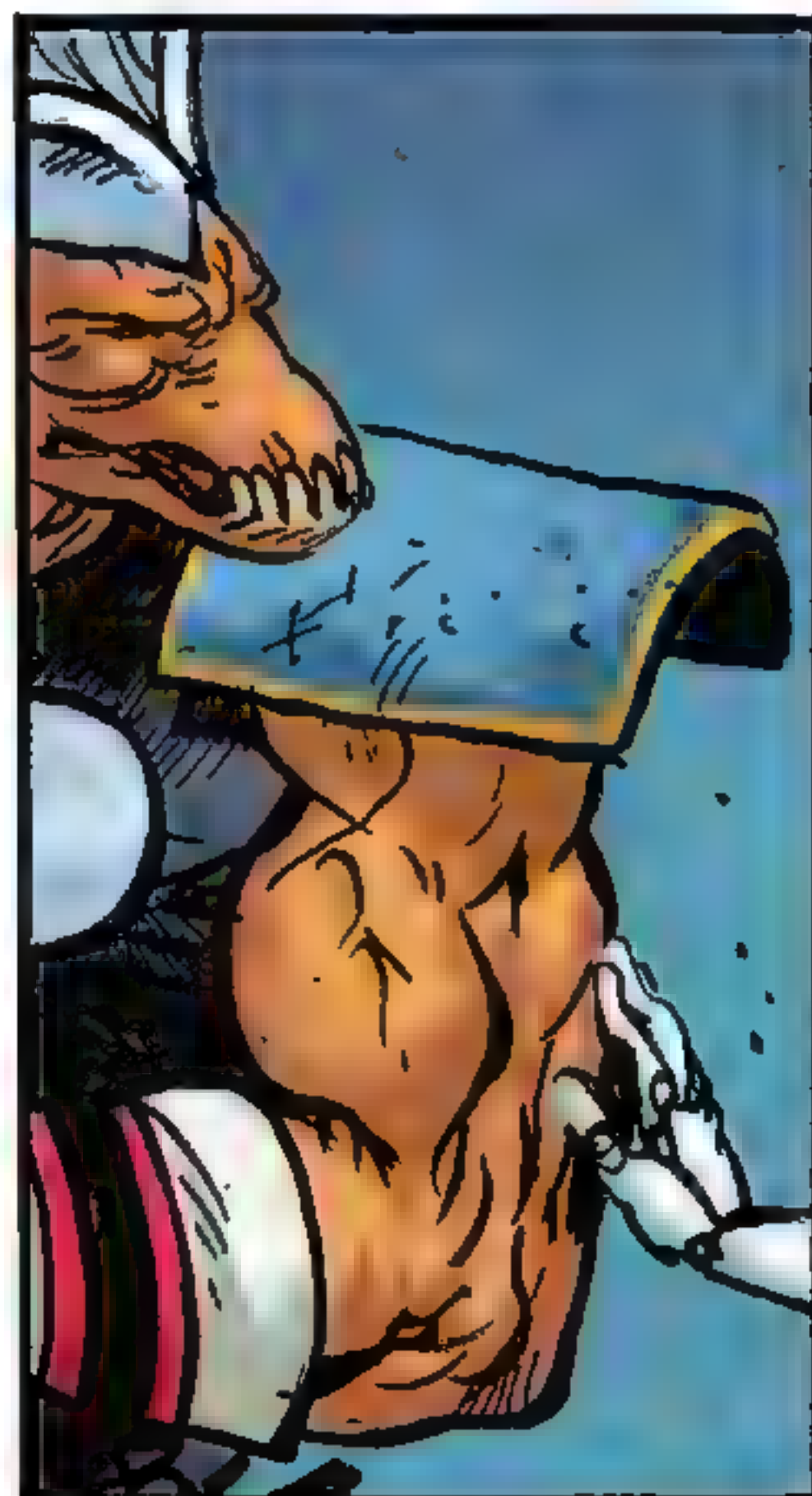
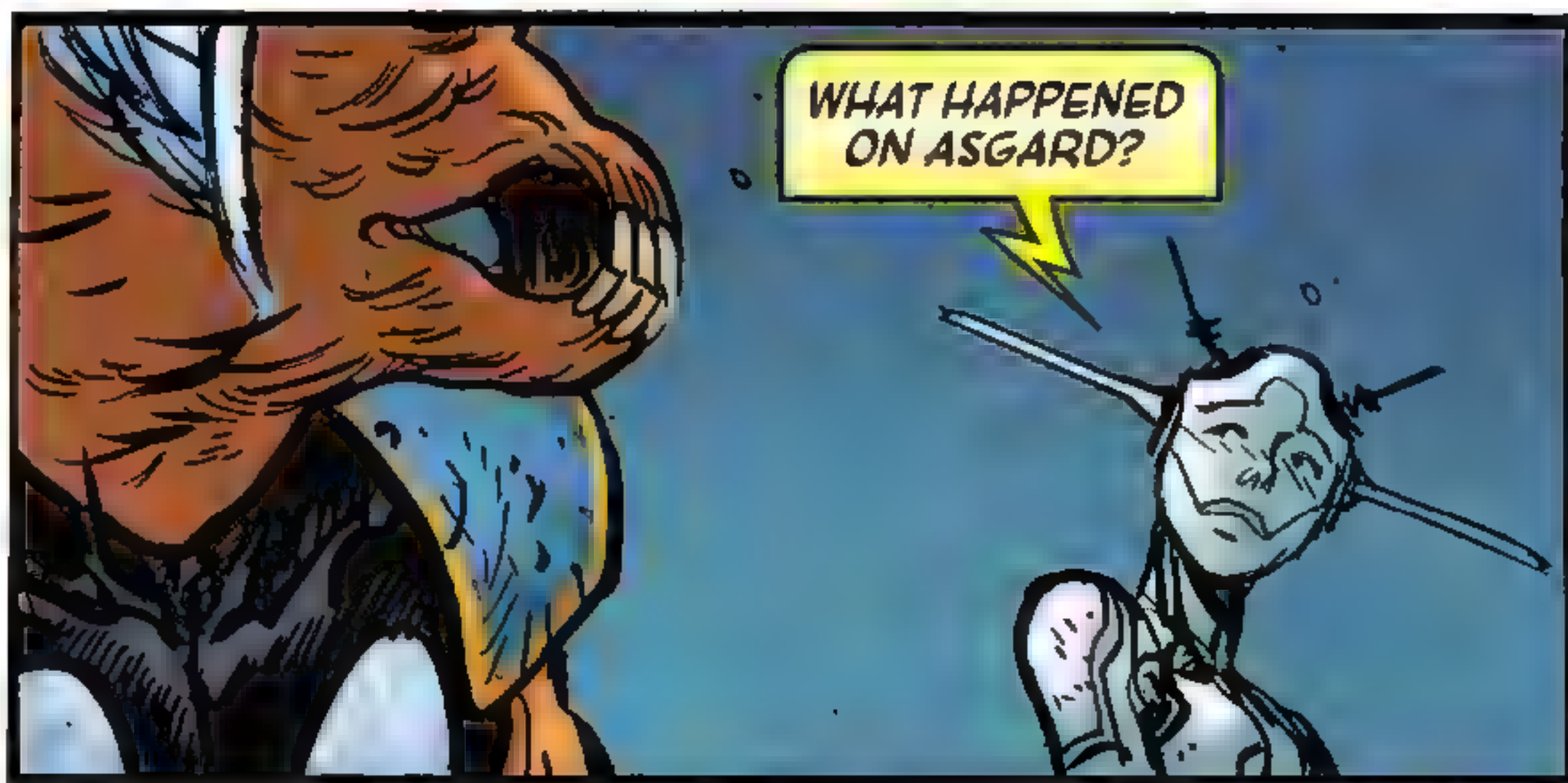
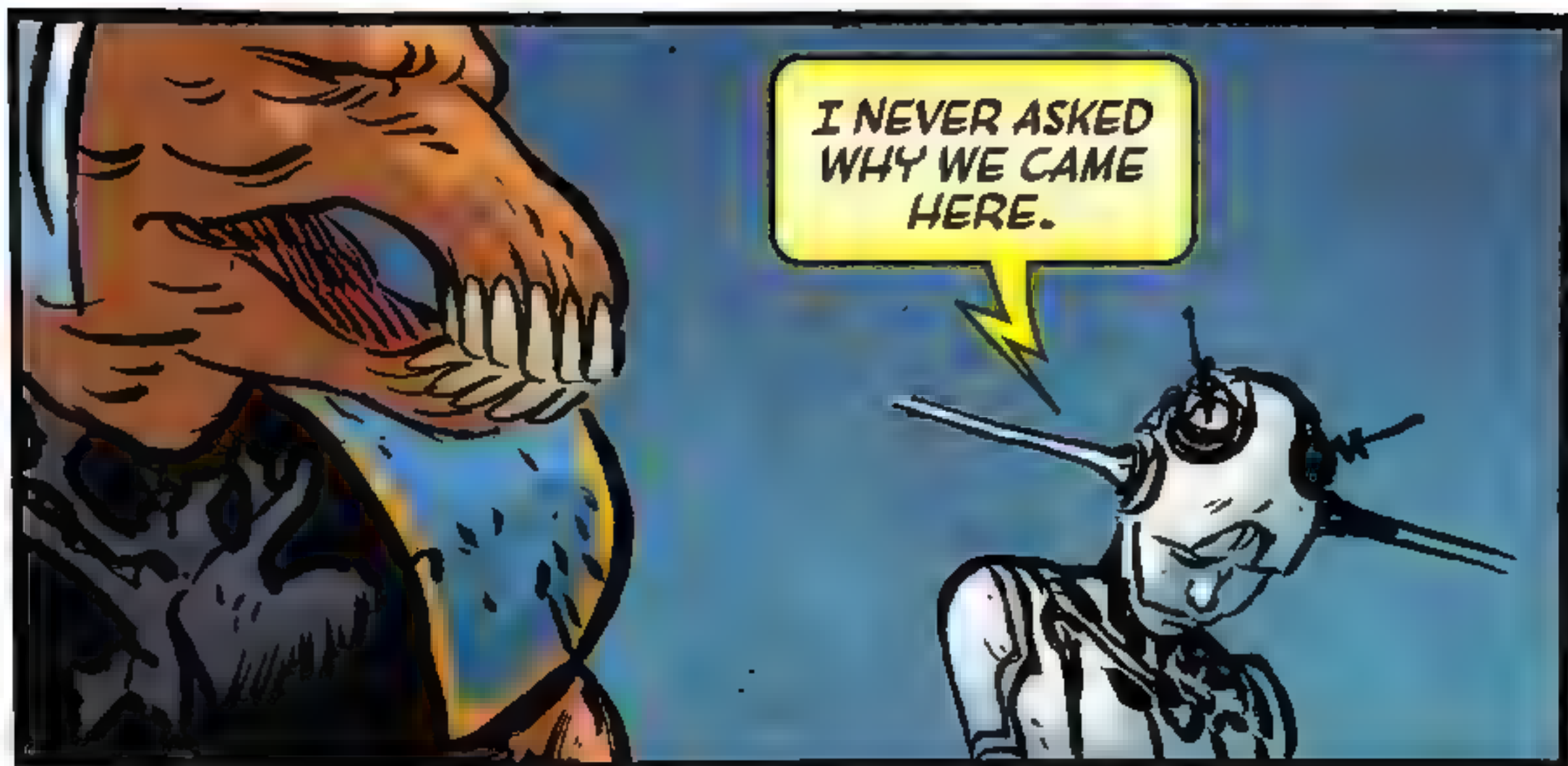
AND THEY'RE
FLEETING,
RIGHT?

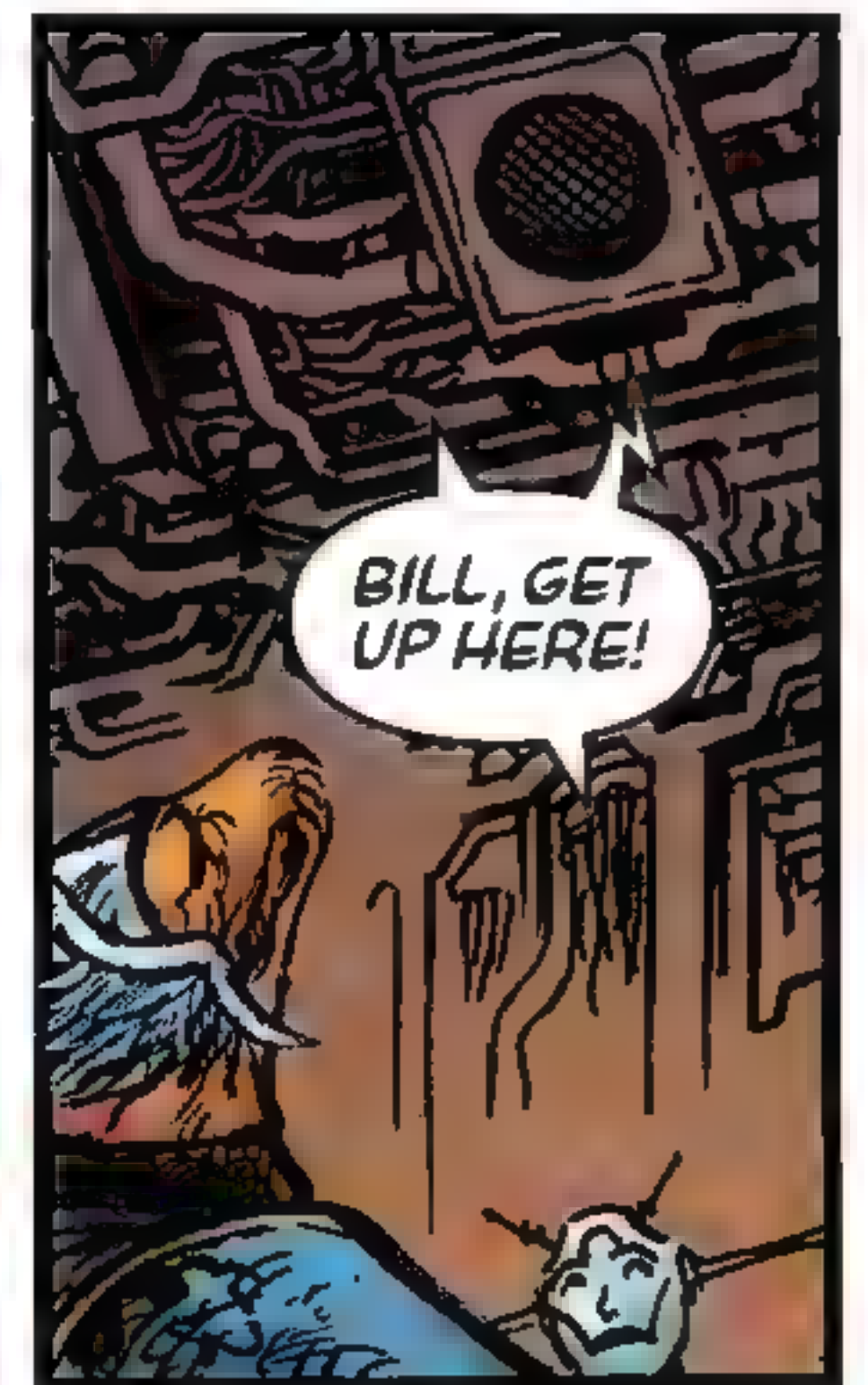
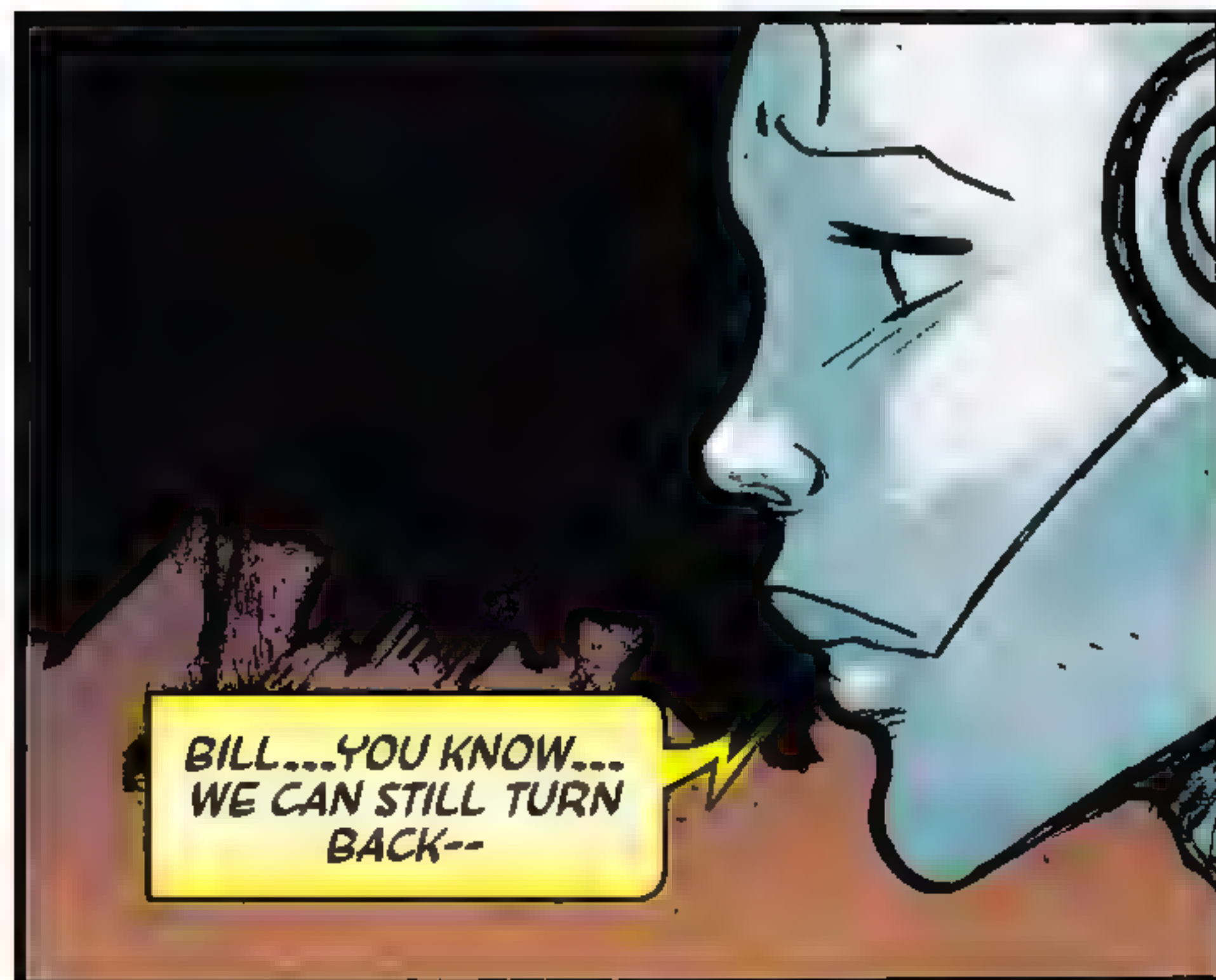
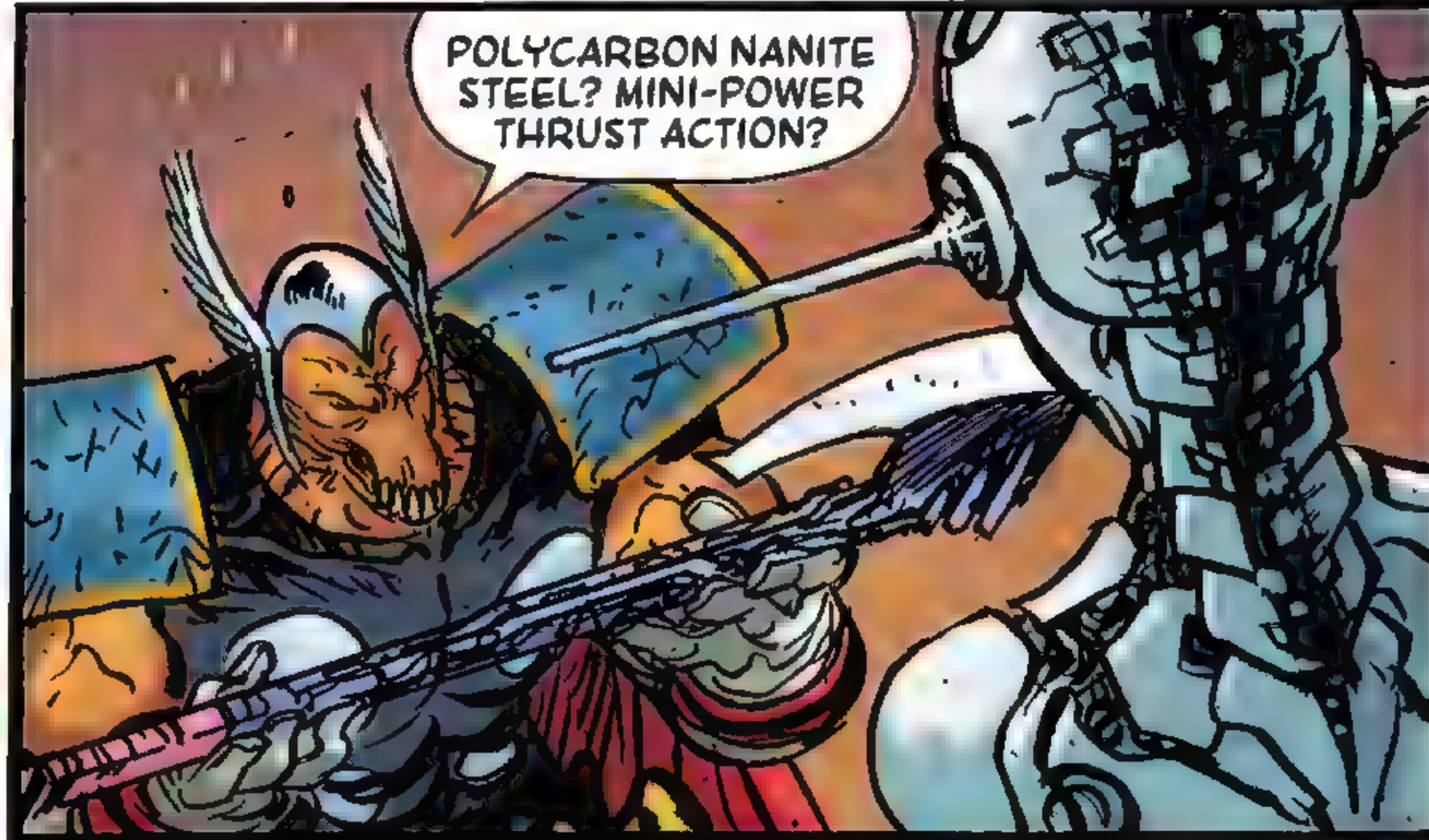
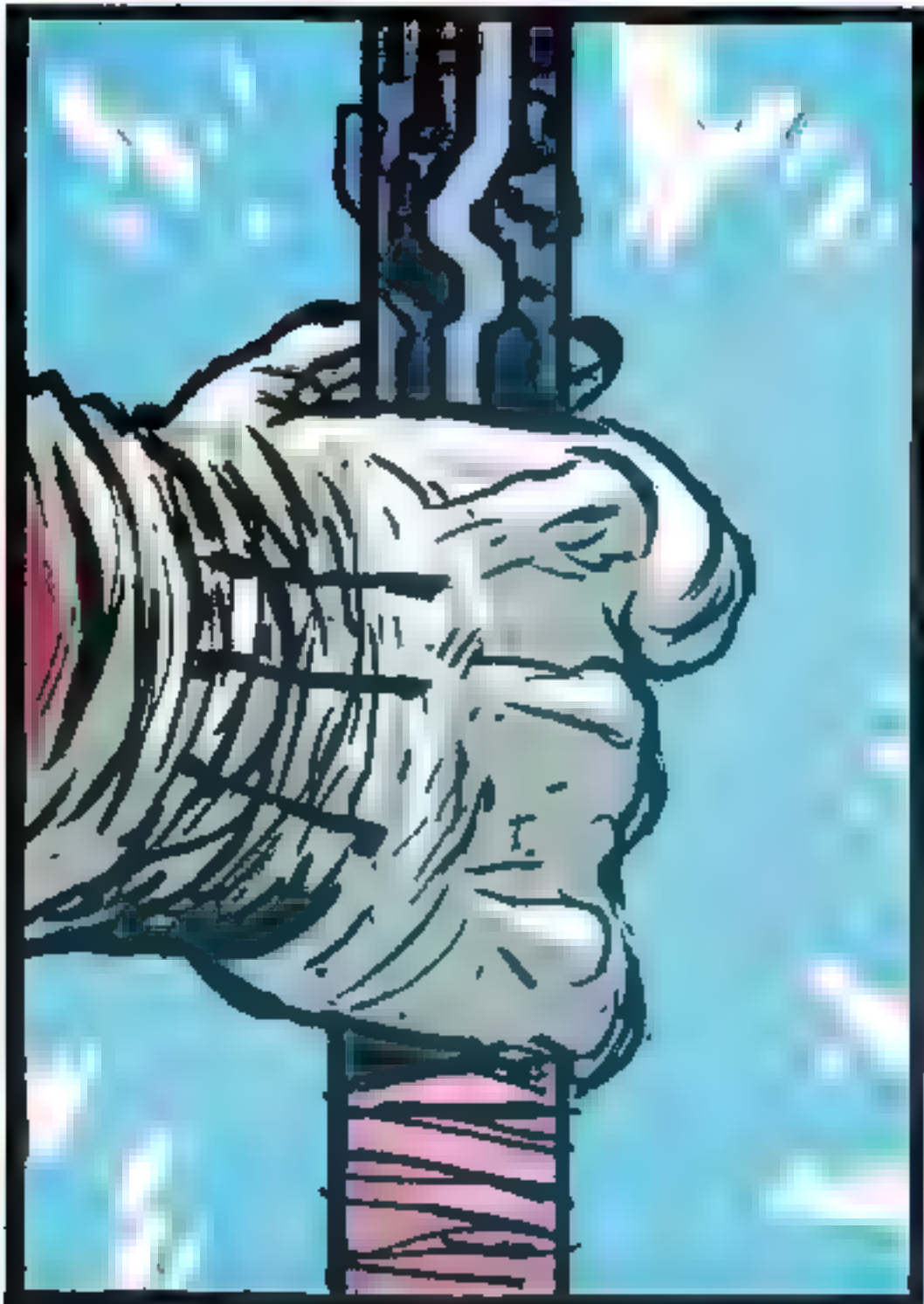
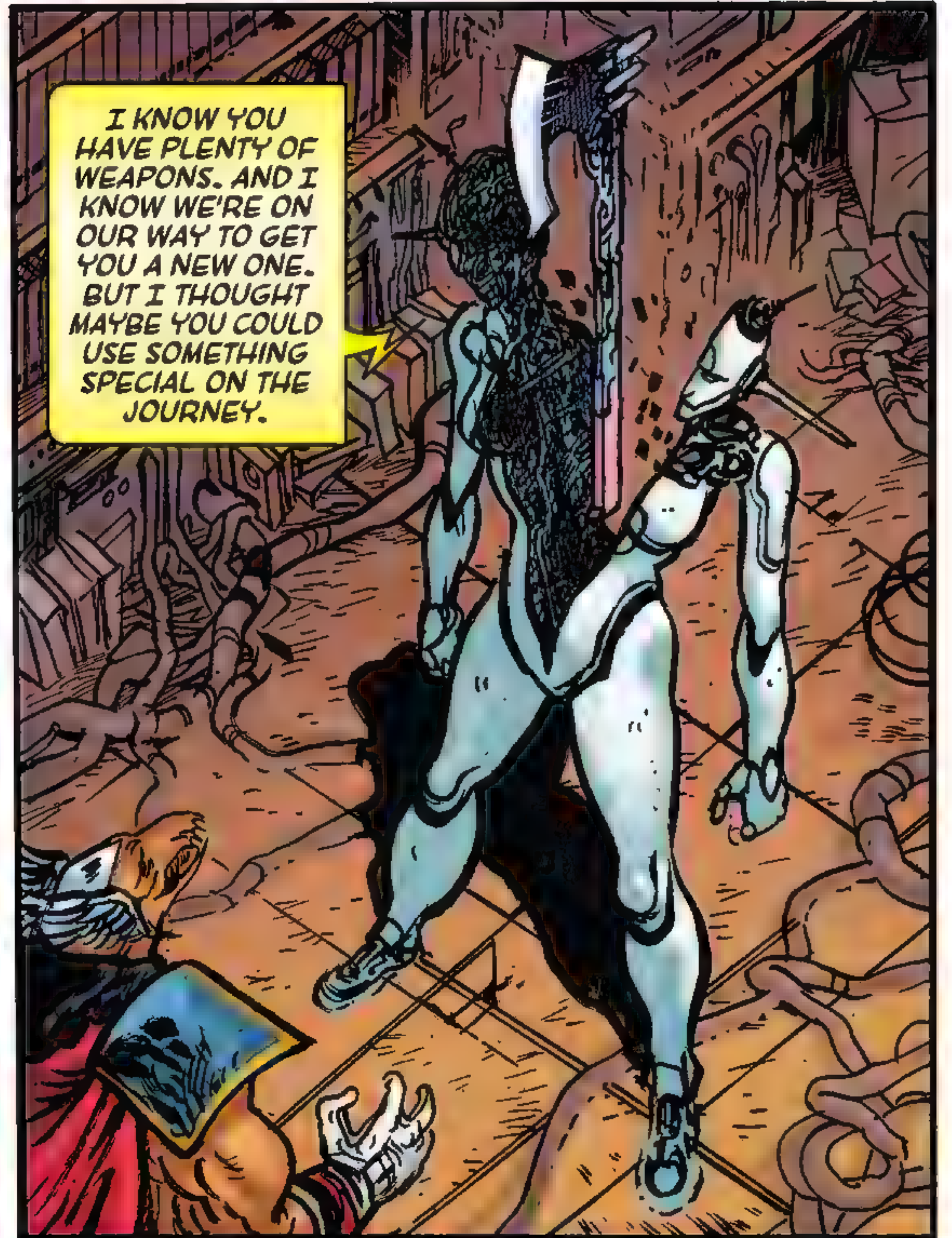
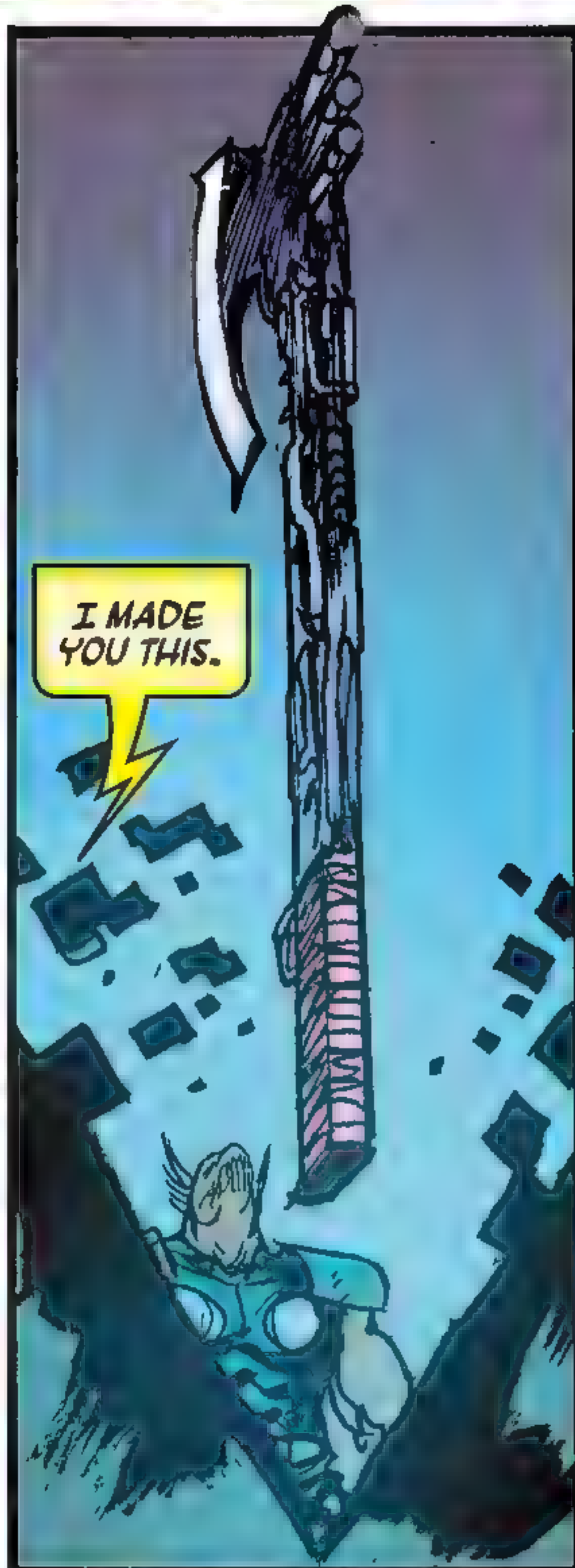
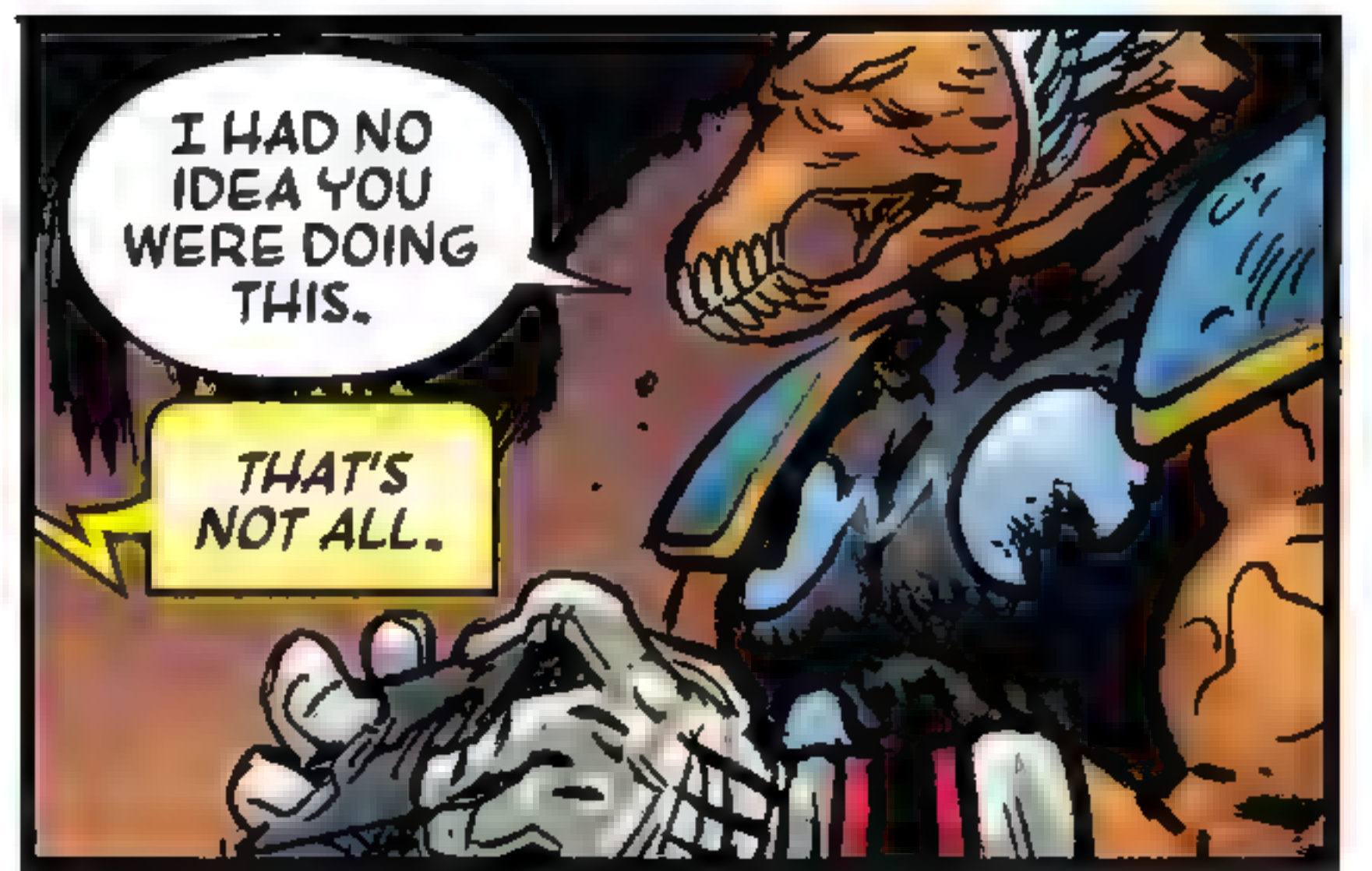
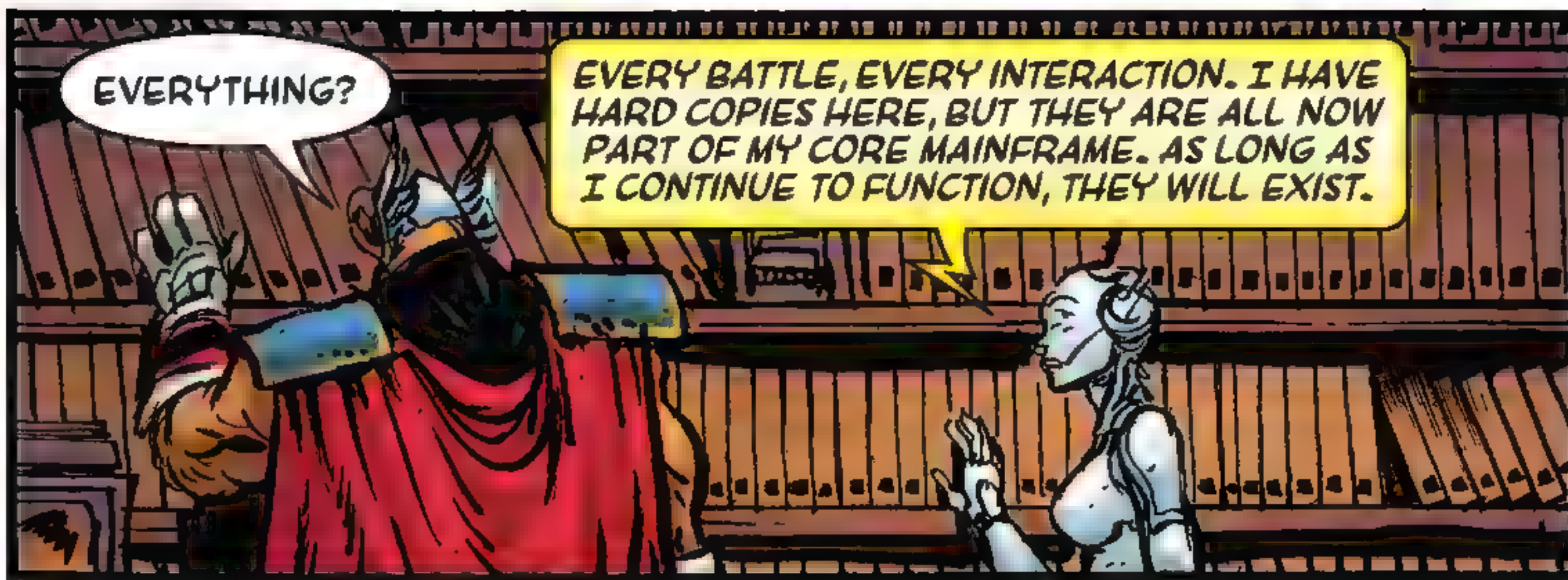


YES,
ALWAYS.

IT'S LIKE I HAD ONE OF
THOSE MOMENTS, BUT
I DIDN'T FORGET. I
JUST KEPT KNOWING.

AND NOW I'M
HERE. WITH YOU.







WHAT IS IT, PIP?

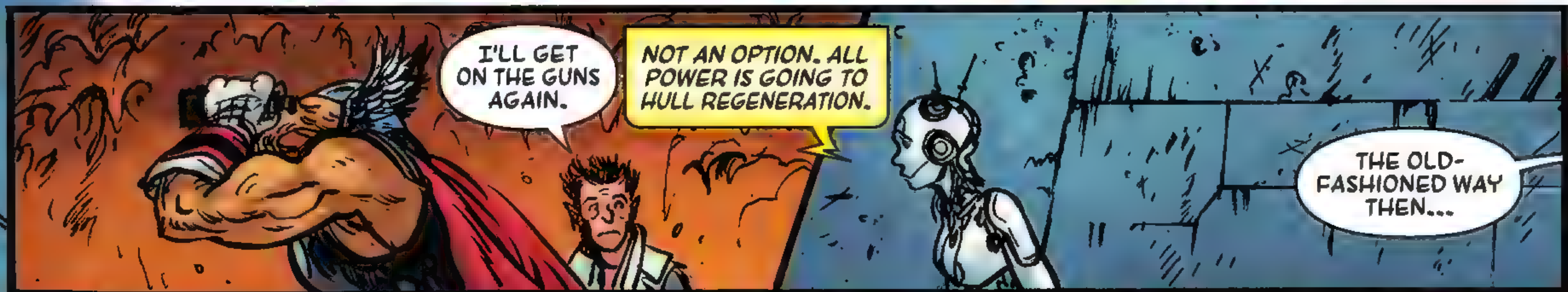
WE'VE GOT A TAIL.



COMING IN FAST--ONE MINUTE TILL CONTACT.

HOW LONG UNTIL WE'RE WHERE WE NEED TO BE?

STILL TWO MILES OUT. YOU'LL NEED TO BUY ME SOME TIME!



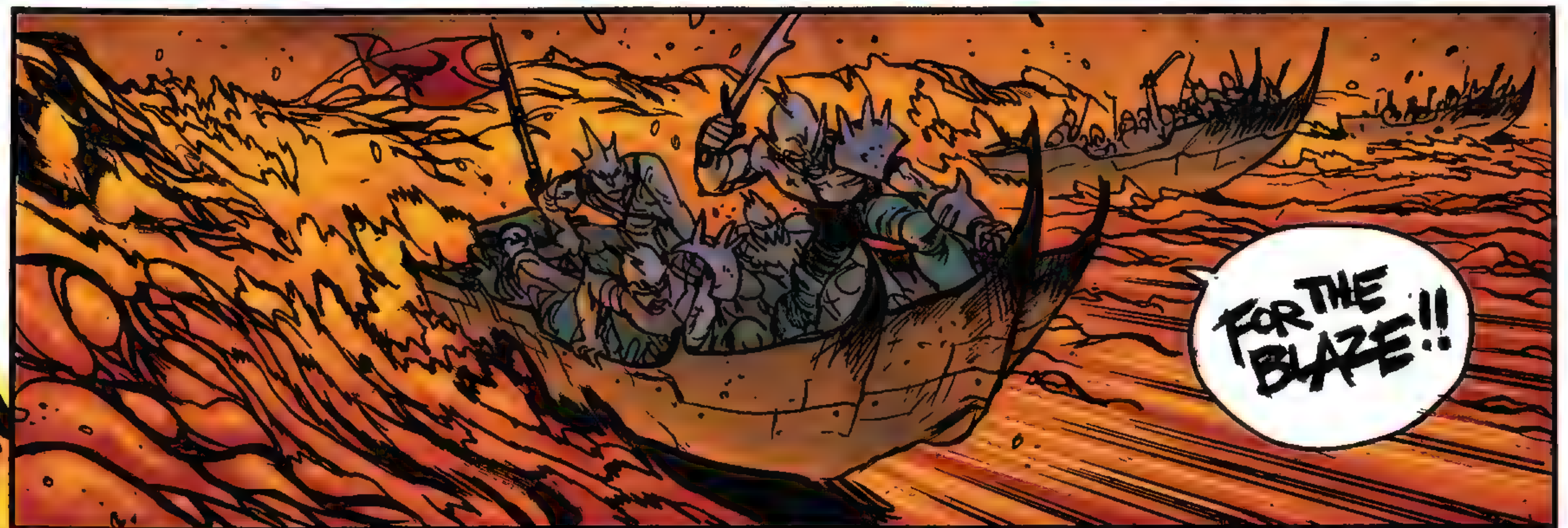
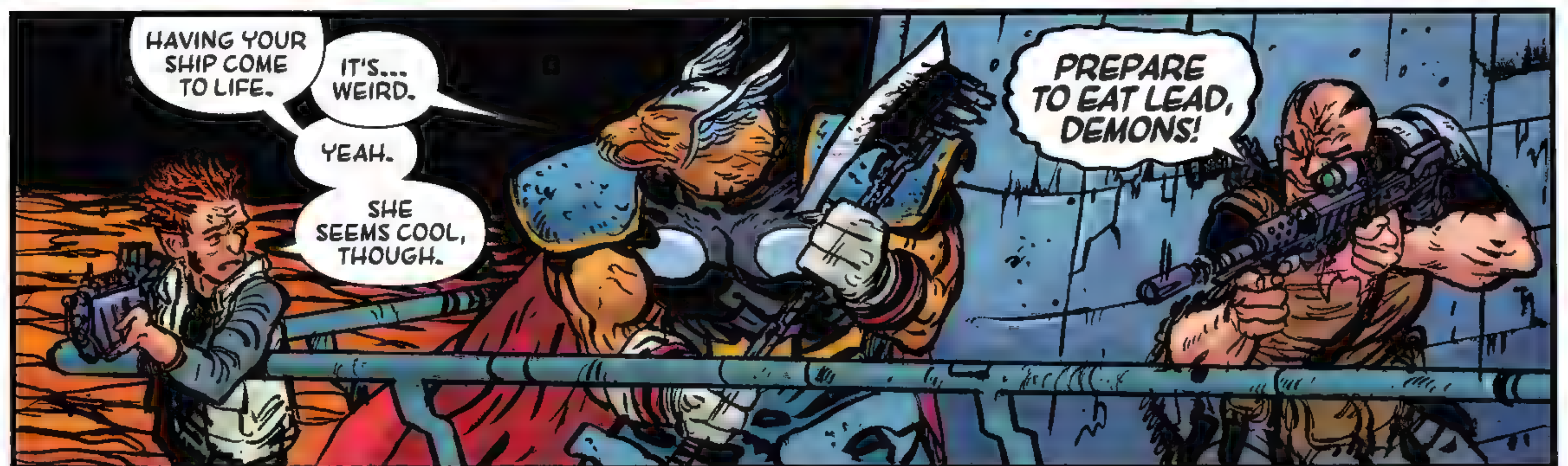
I'LL GET ON THE GUNS AGAIN.

NOT AN OPTION. ALL POWER IS GOING TO HULL REGENERATION.

THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY THEN...

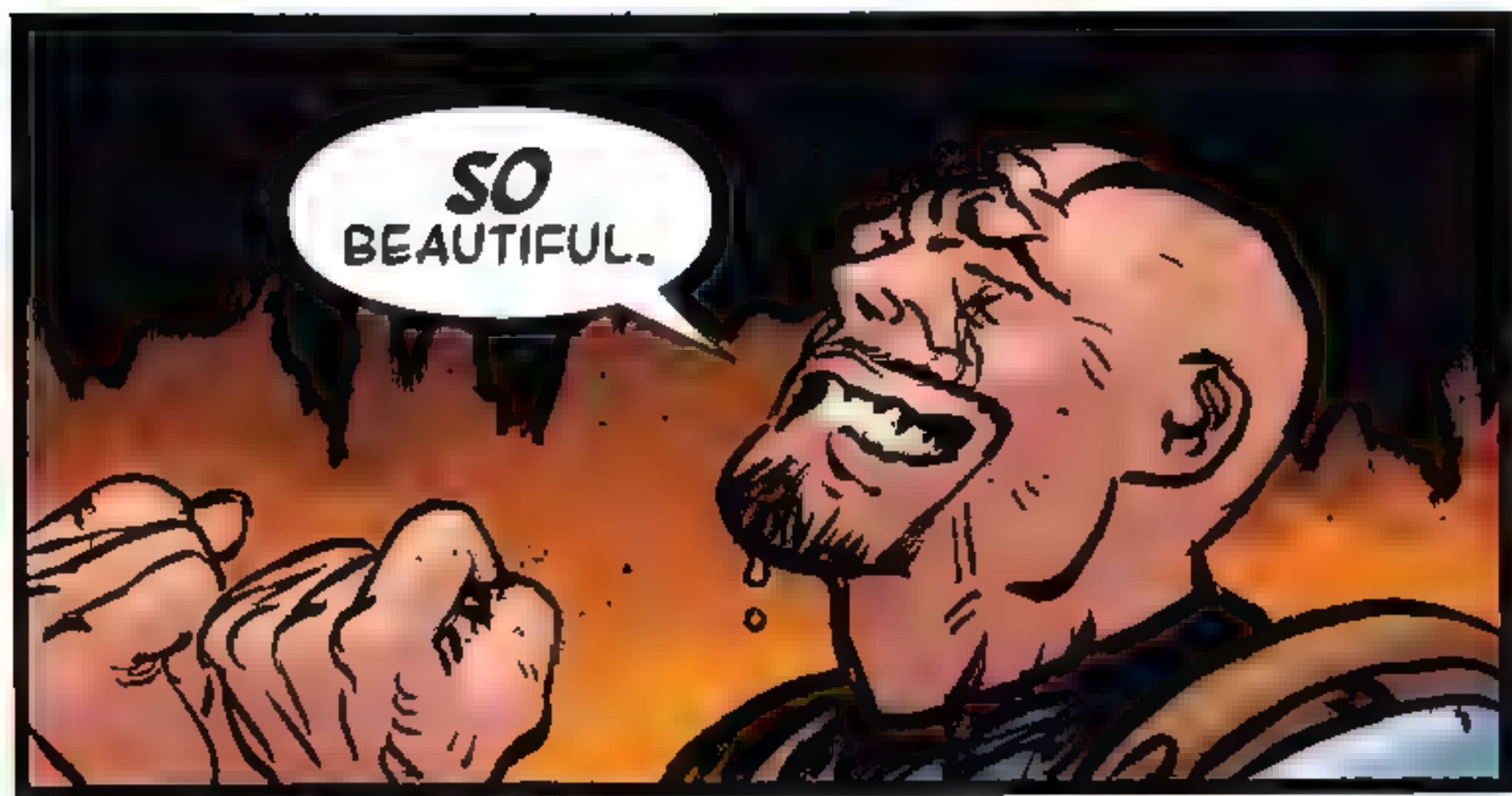
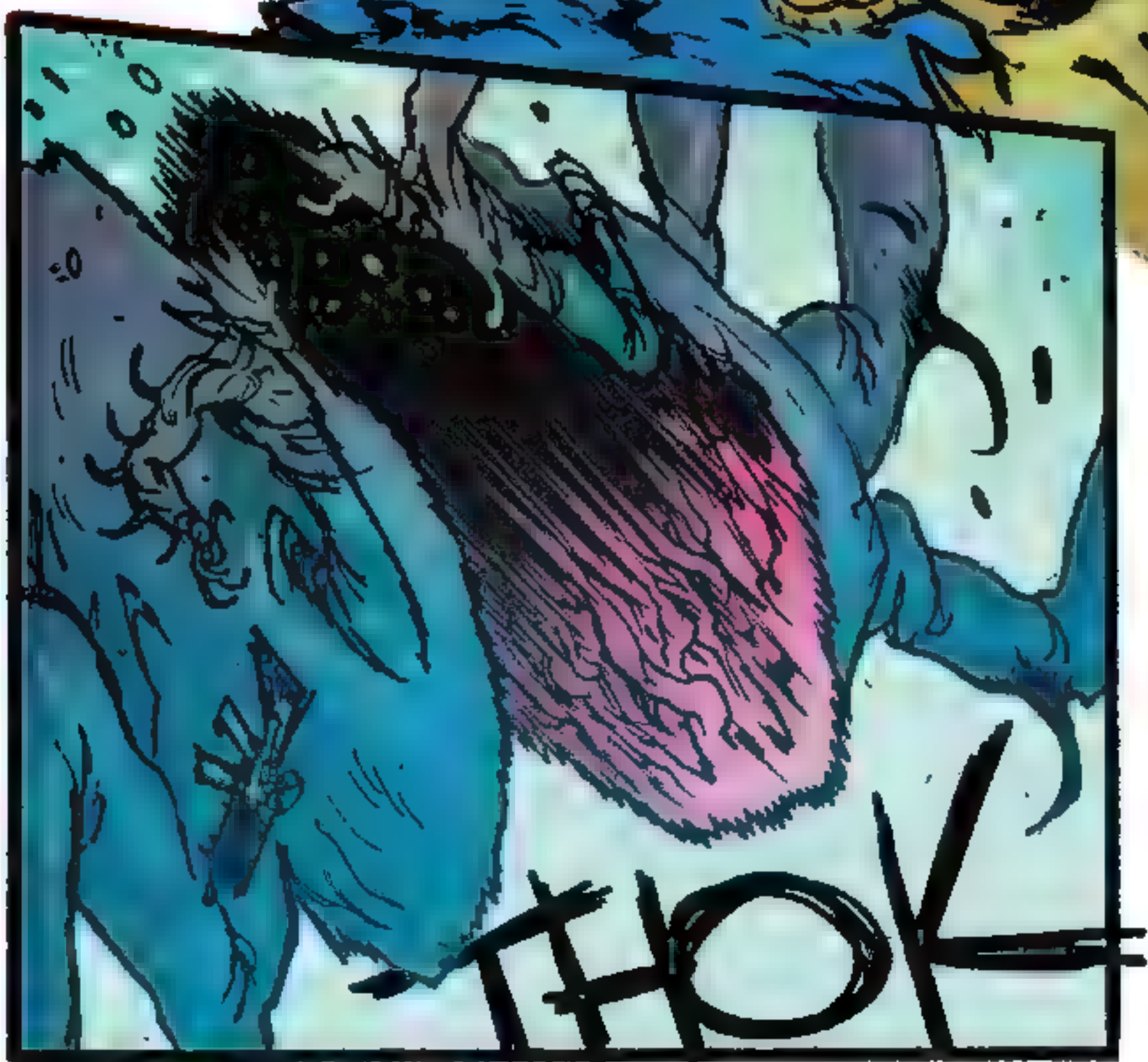


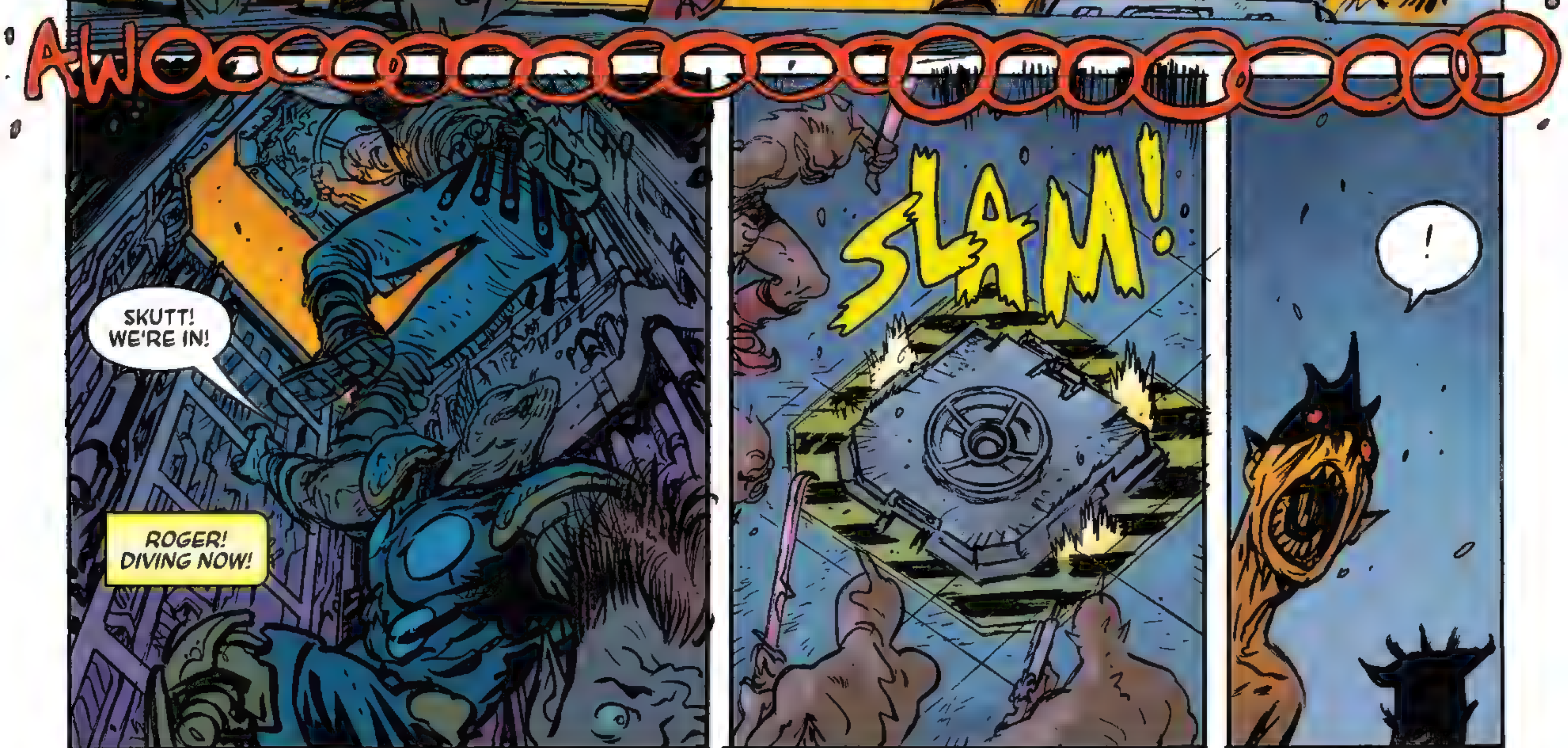
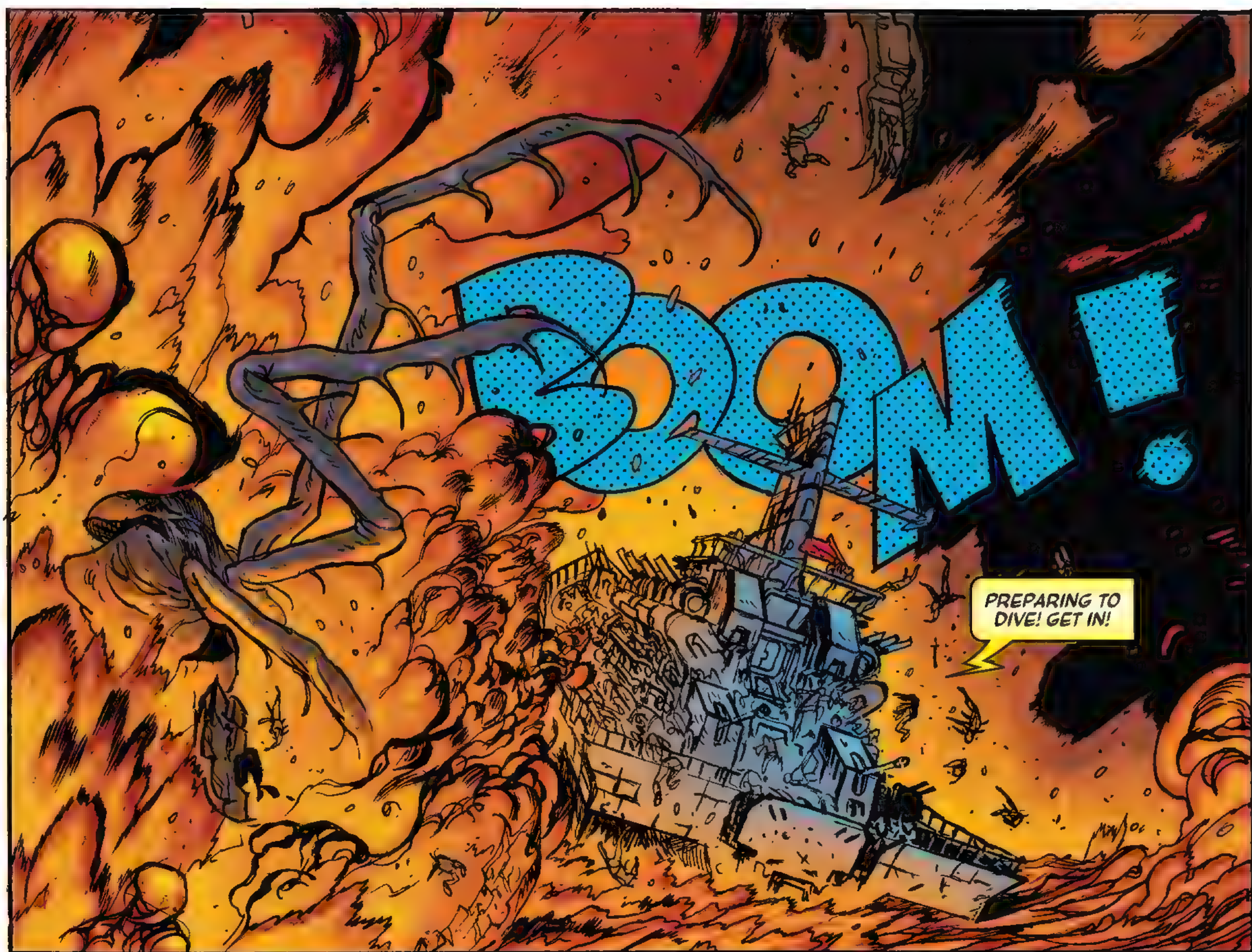
LET'S DO THIS.

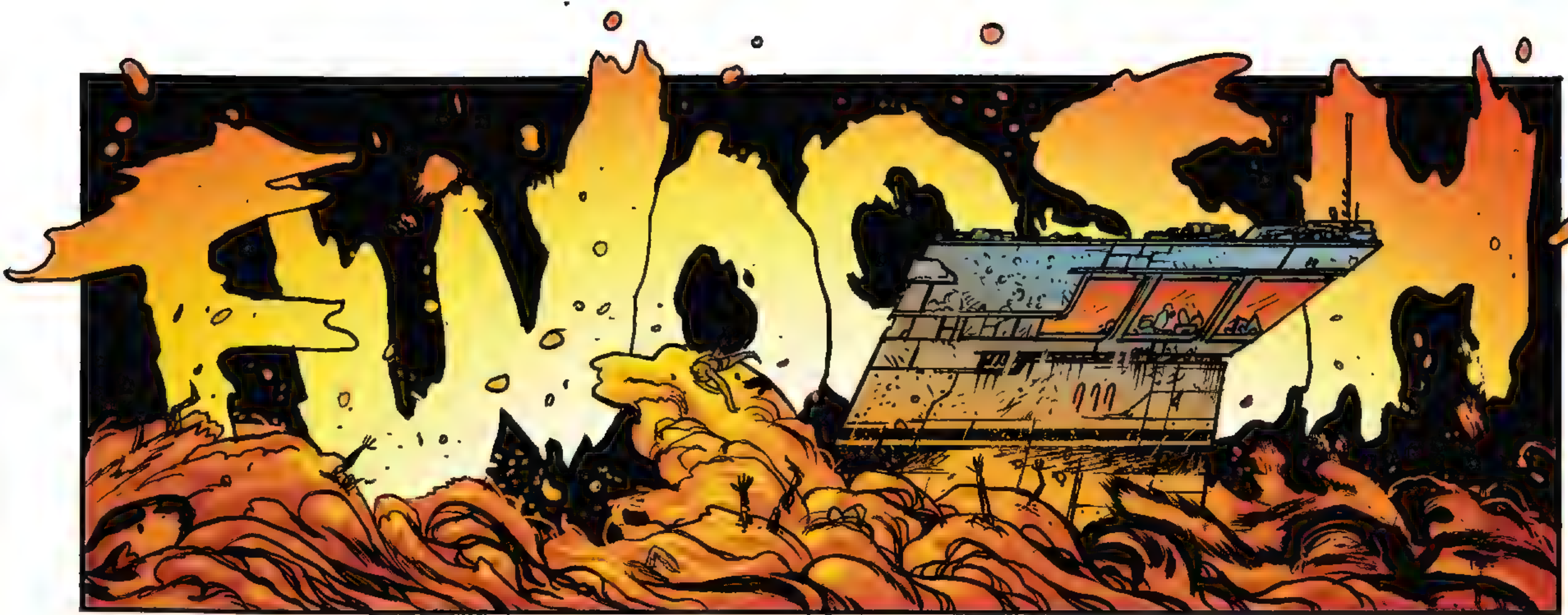


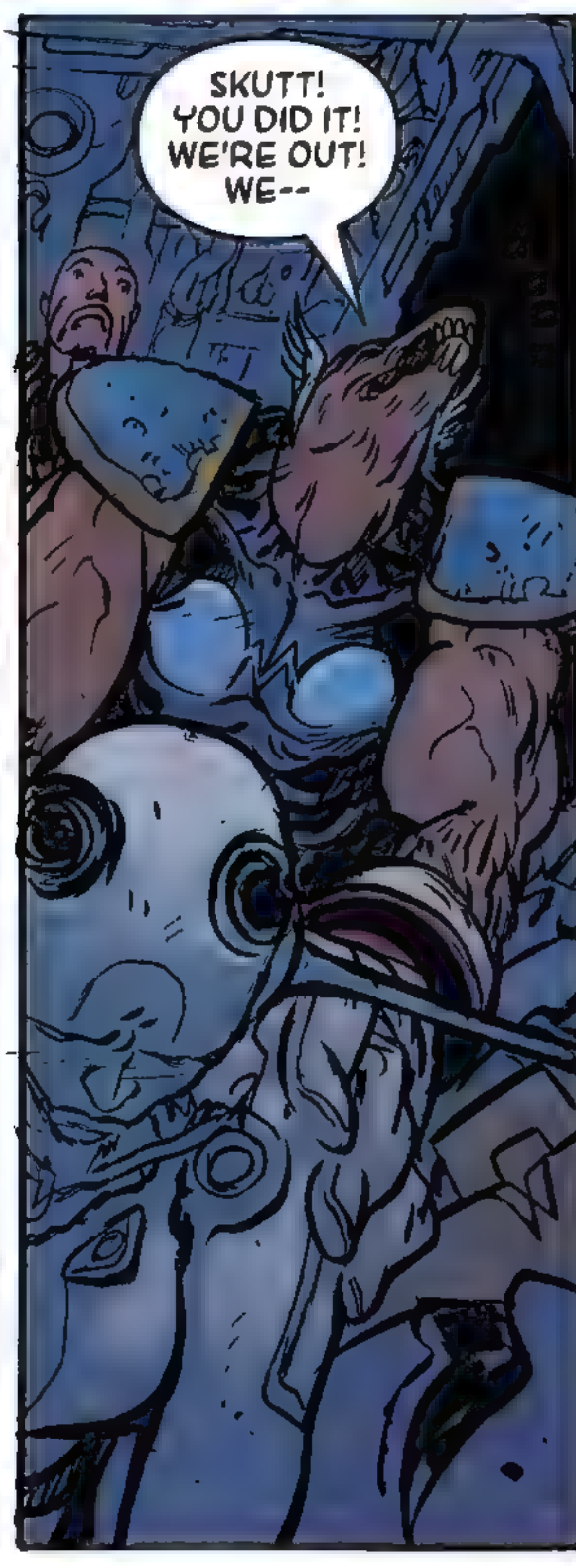
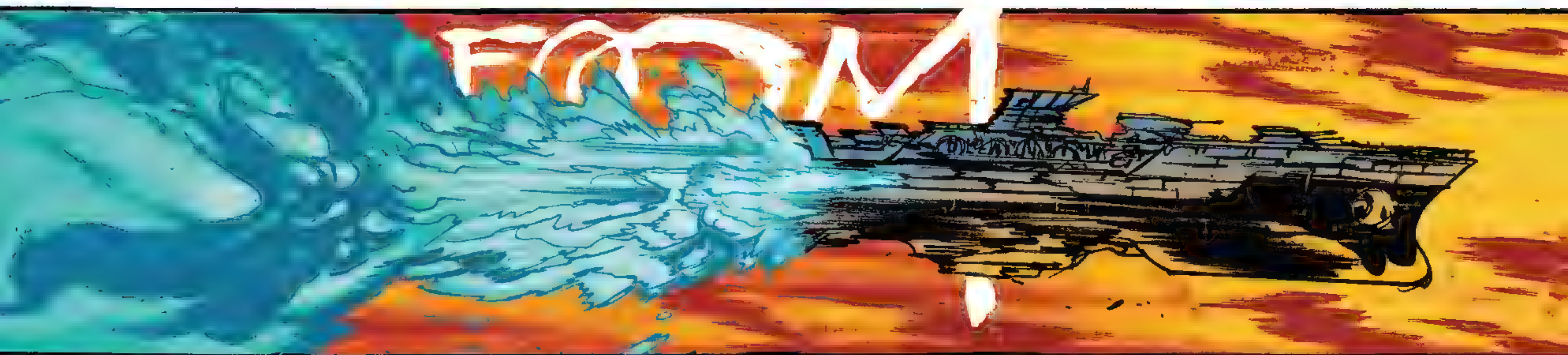
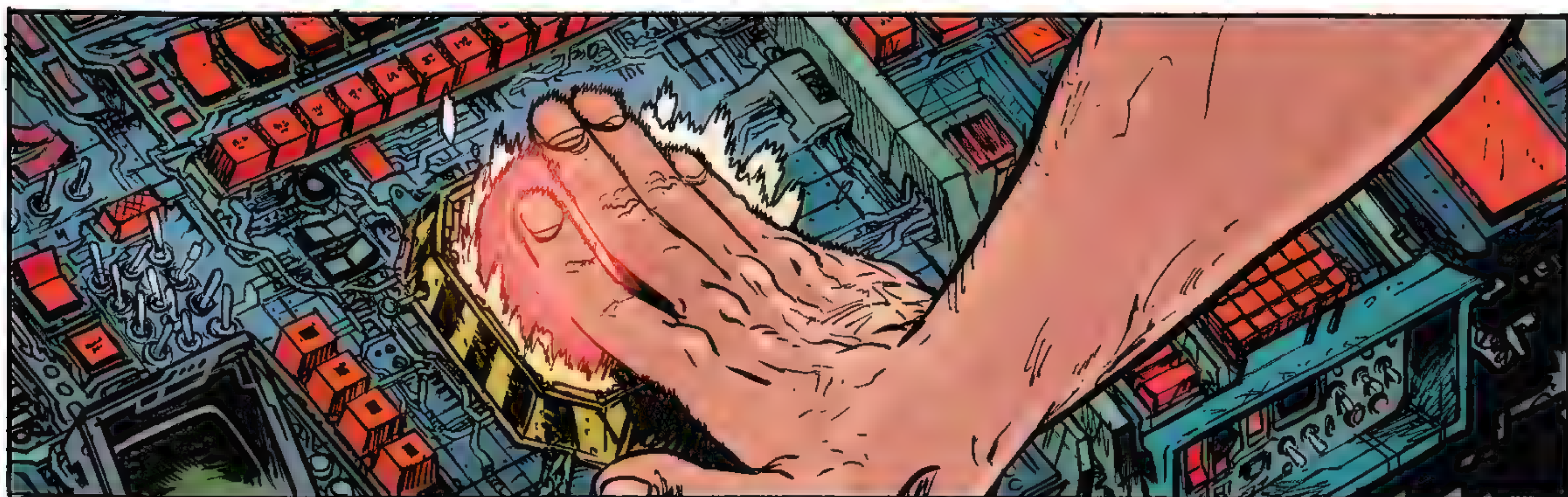








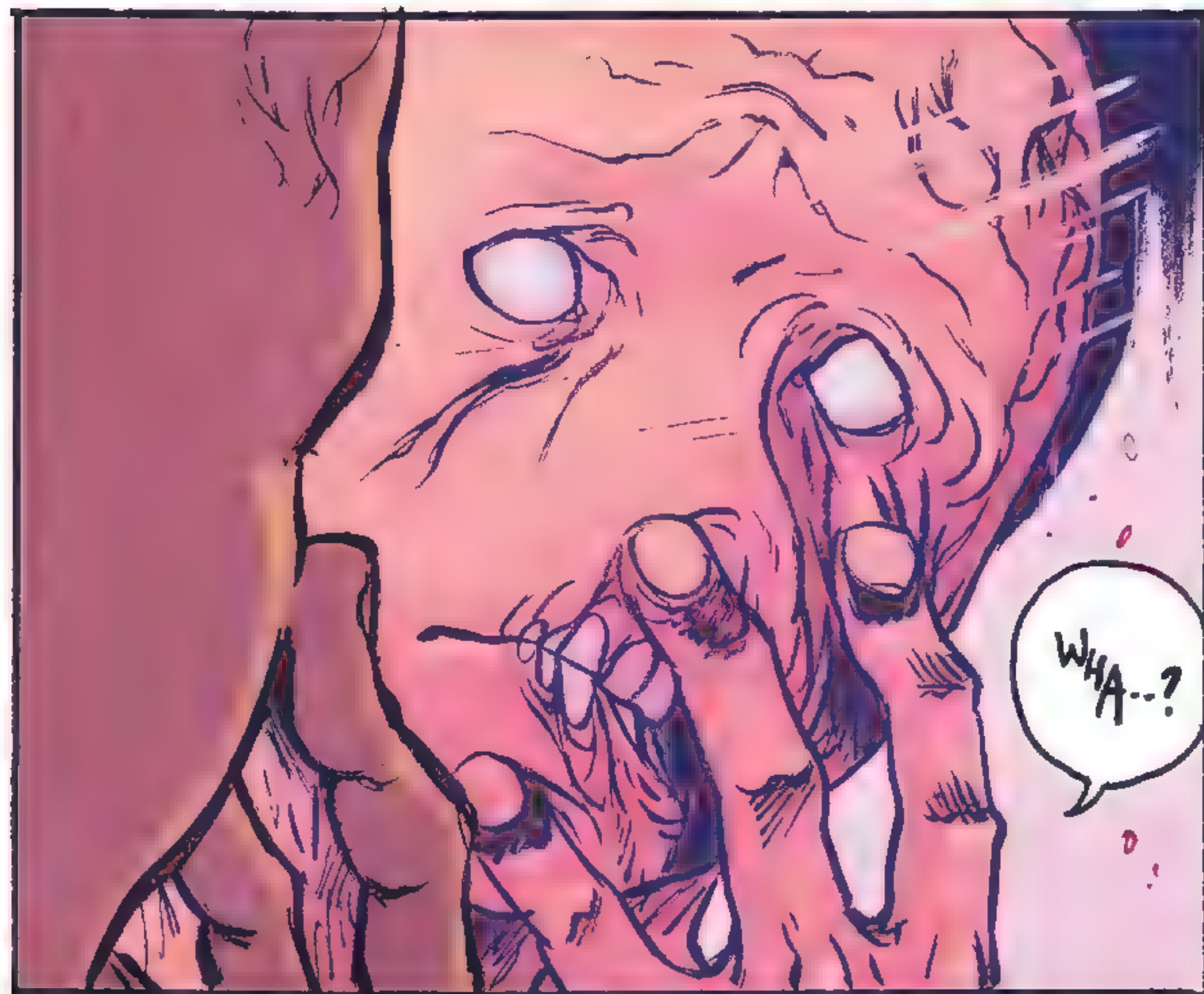
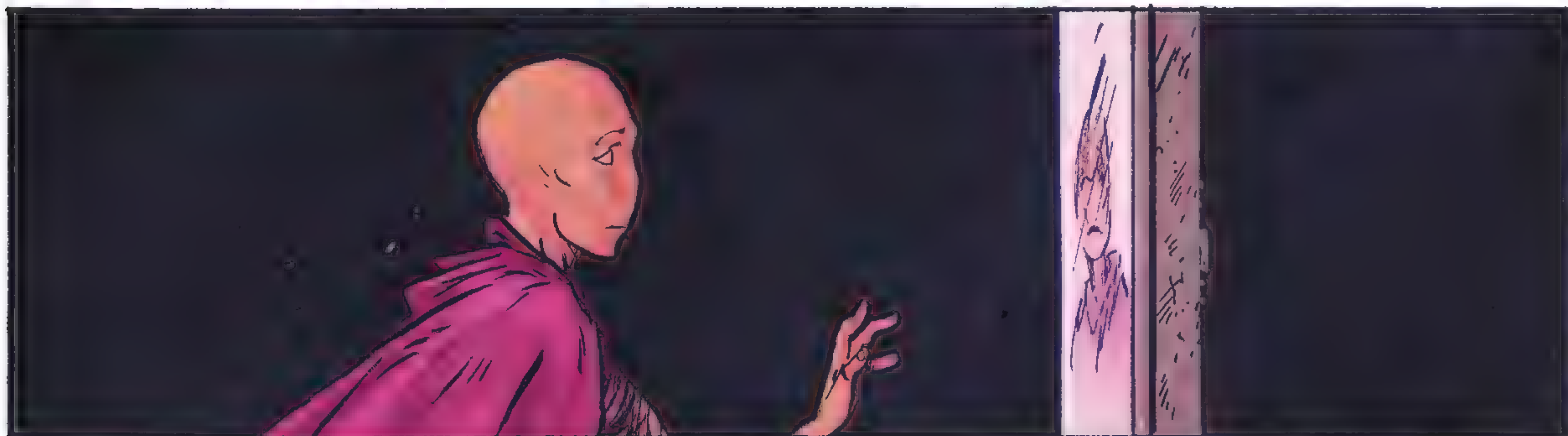


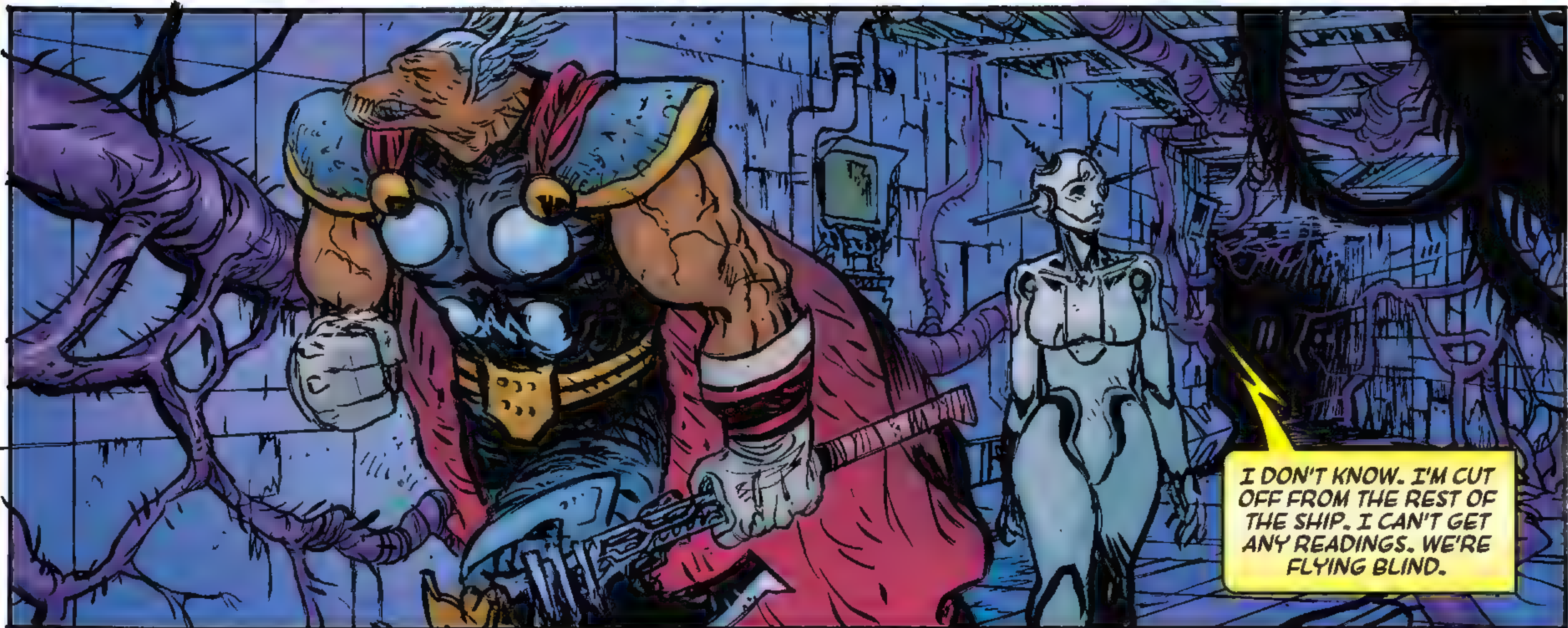




WHAT--
WHAT IS
THAT?









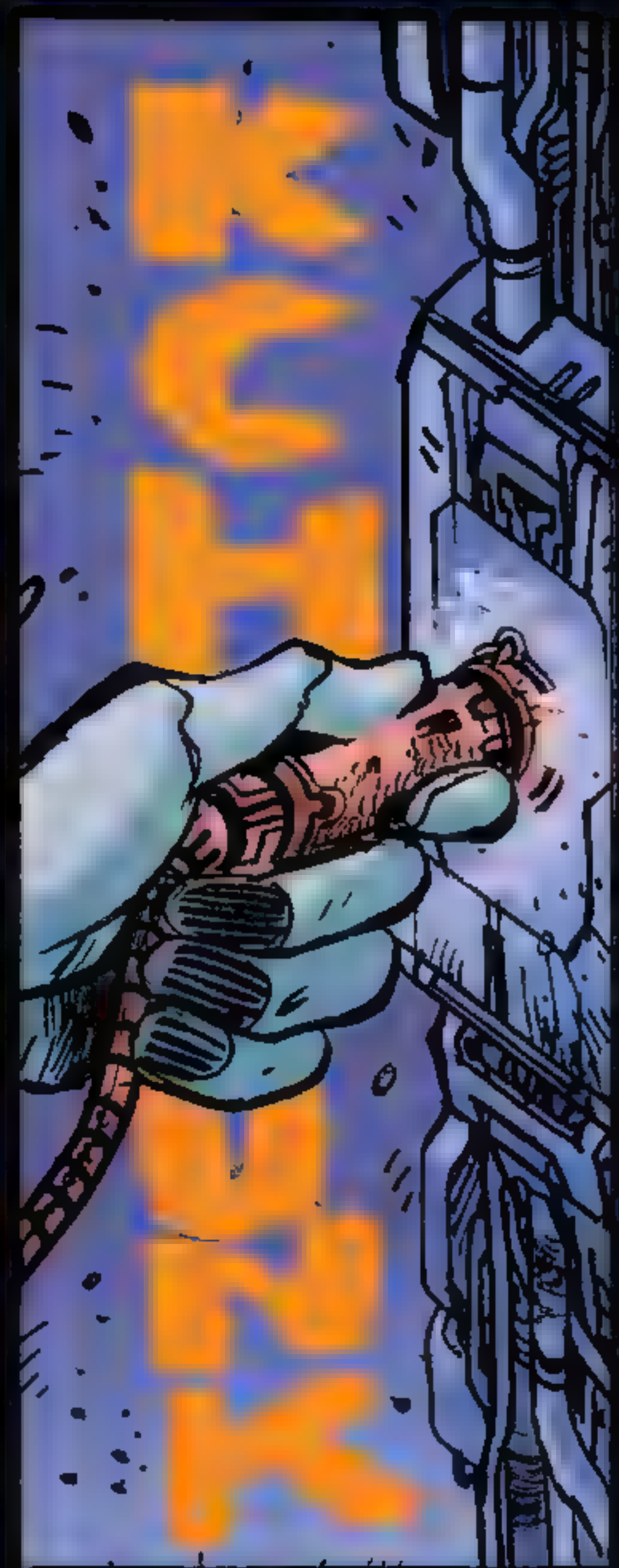
WHAT IS THIS THING?!



WE'RE
INSIDE SOME SORT
OF CREATURE, AND
IT'S TAKING US
SOMEWHERE
FAST.

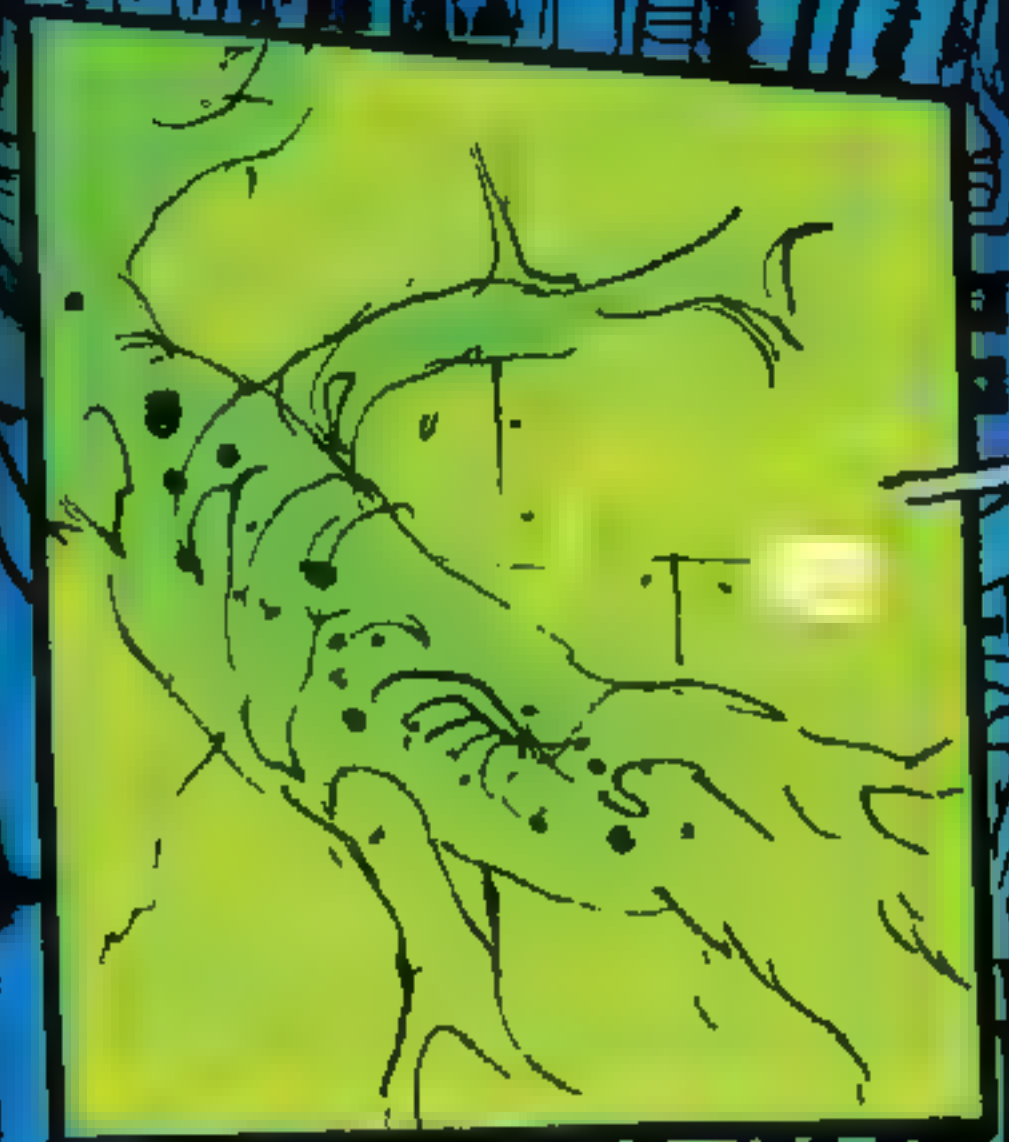
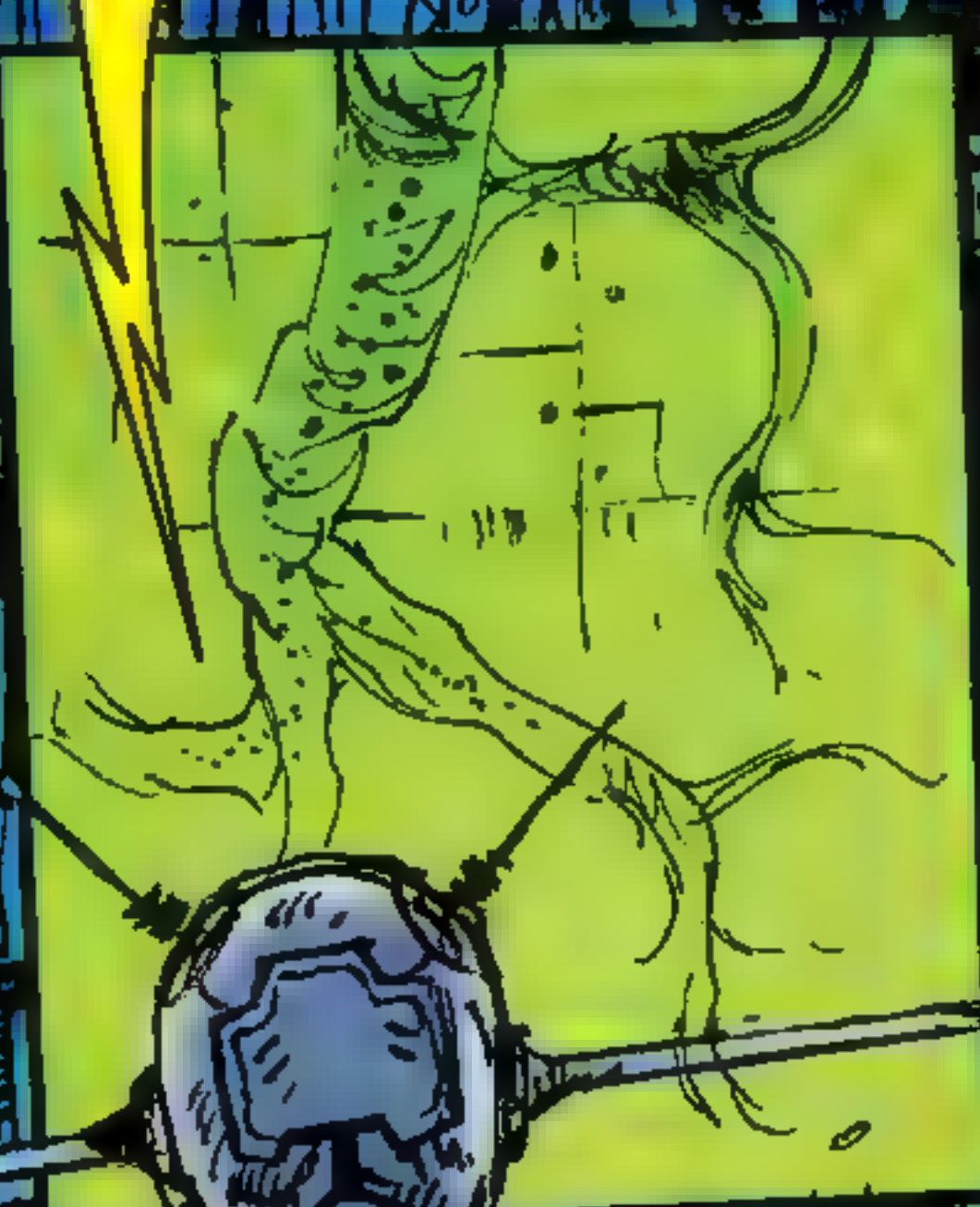


I'VE GOT TO SEE THE STATE
OF THE REST OF THE SHIP.
LET ME SEE IF I CAN
PATCH INTO MYSELF WITH
AN ANALOG CONNECTION...



AGHHH!

THIS THING IS
EVERYWHERE.
IT'S LIKE AN
INFECTION--



WAS
THAT...?

SKURGE!



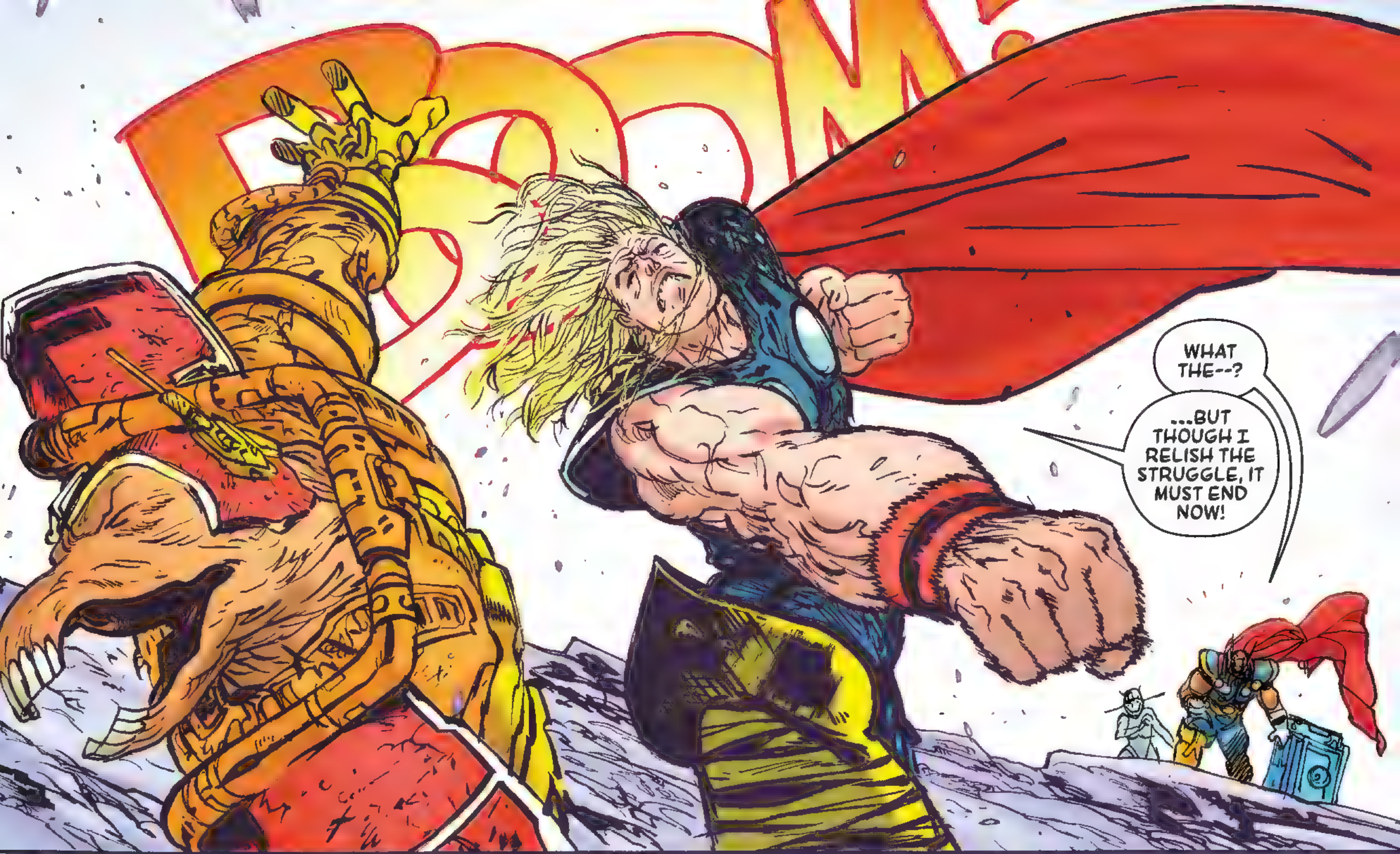
BILL--
WAIT!

WE ARE
COMING FOR YOU,
BROTHER!

I DON'T THINK
WE SHOULD--



NEVER
HAVE I BEEN
SO WELL MATCHED
BY ANY MORTAL...

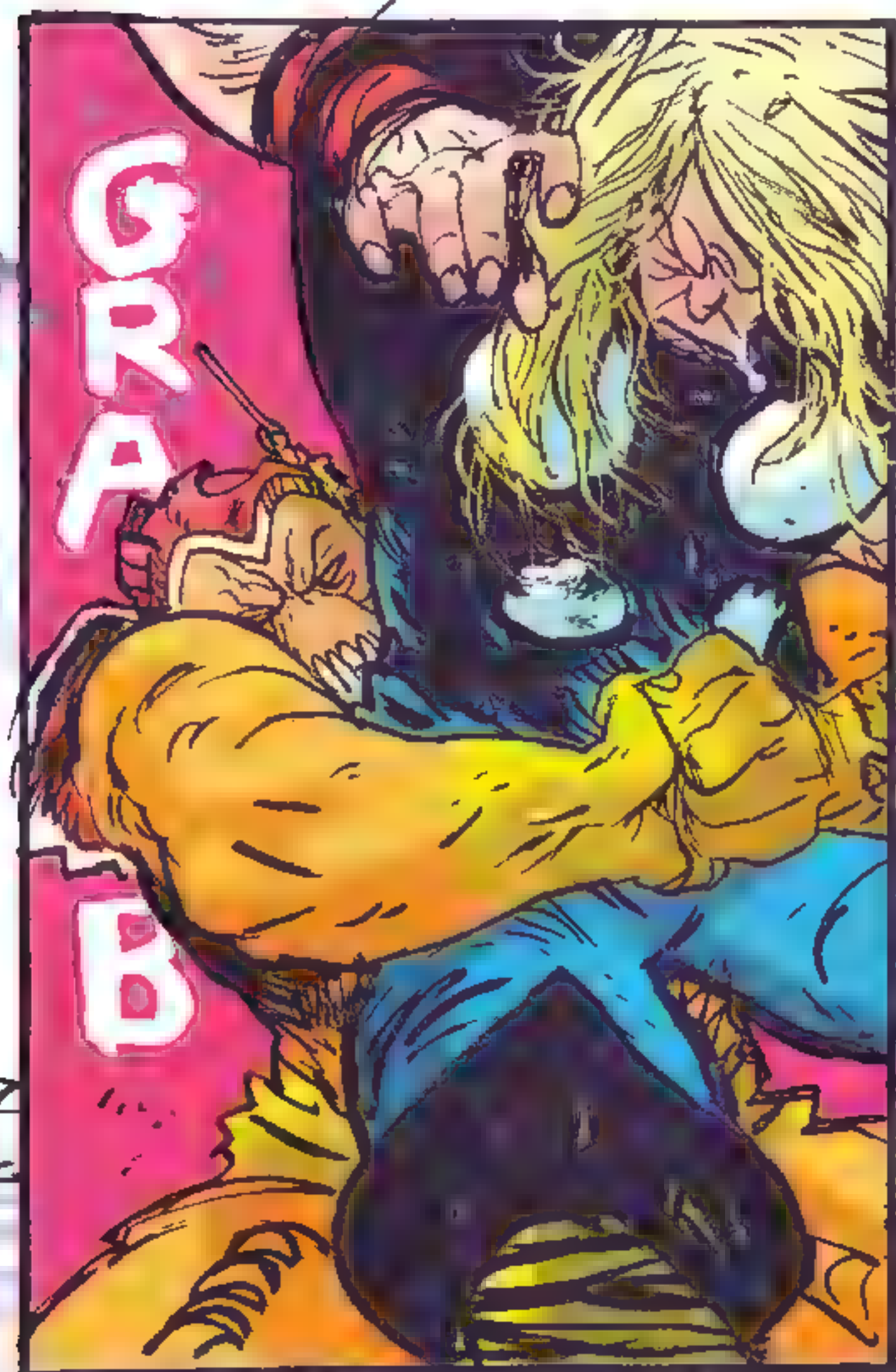
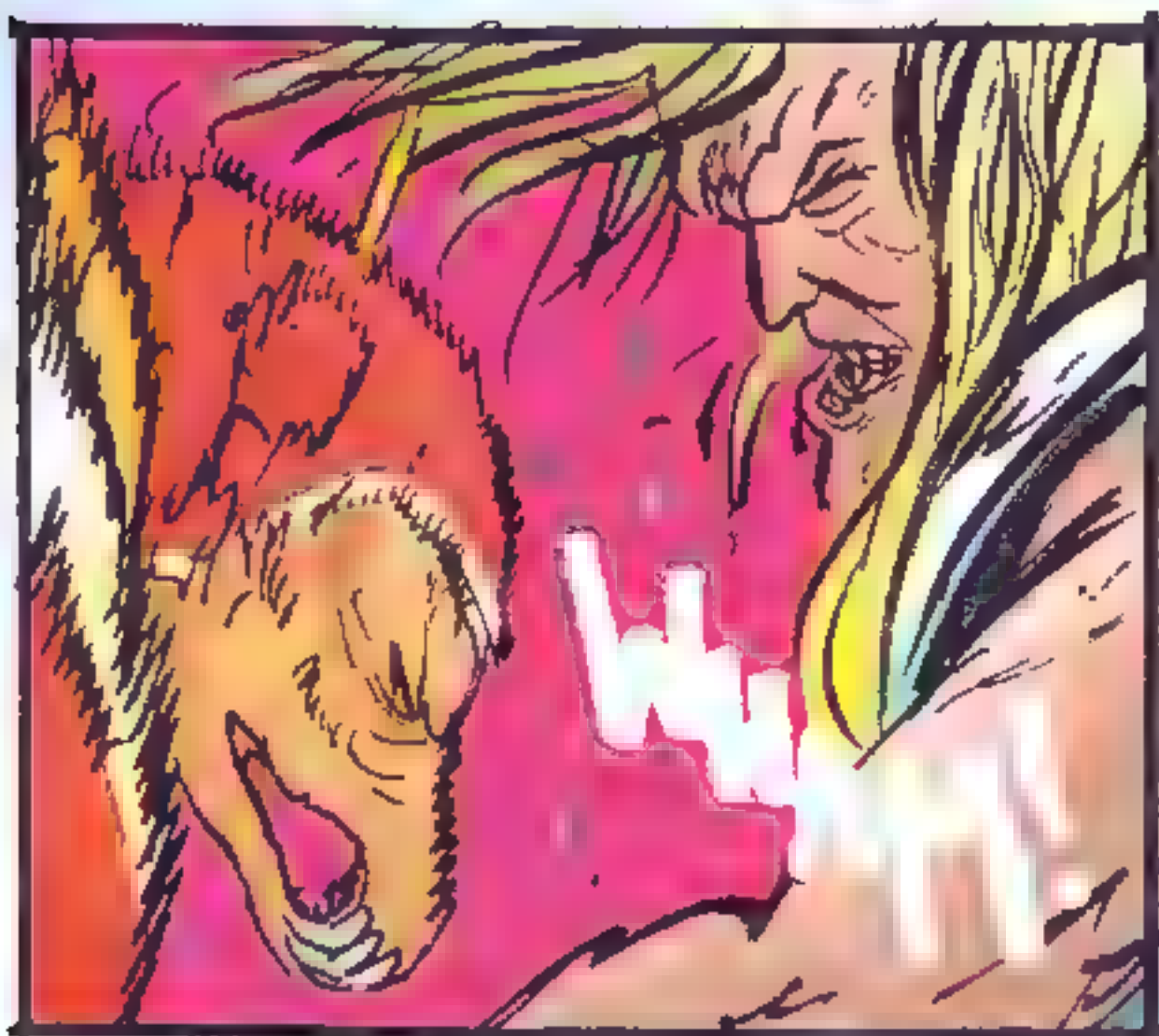


WHAT
THE--?

...BUT
THOUGH I
RELISH THE
STRUGGLE, IT
MUST END
NOW!



WILL
YOU YIELD,
WARRIOR?

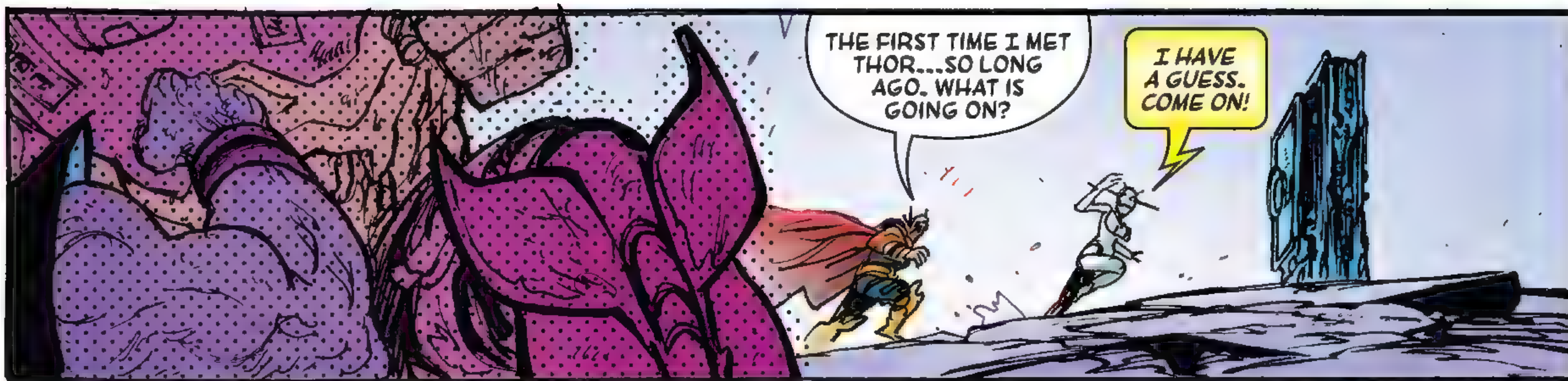


GRG
B



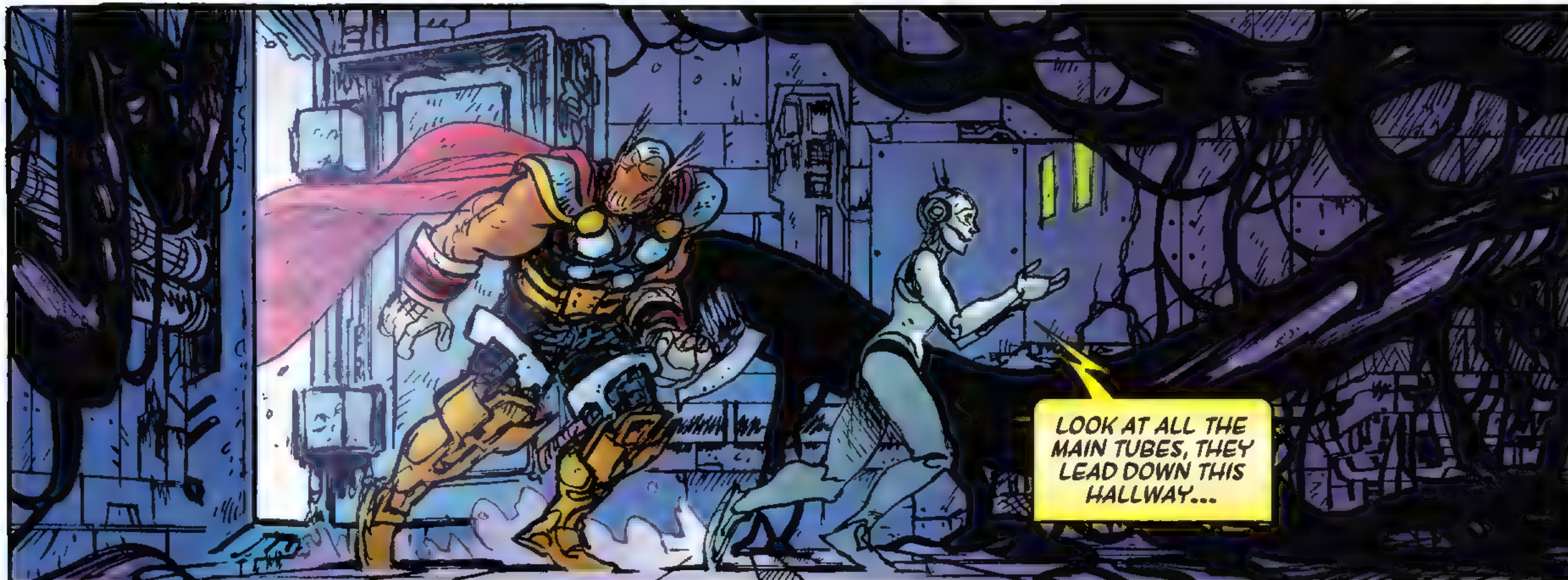
ONLY IN
DEATH!

KRAK



THE FIRST TIME I MET THOR...SO LONG AGO. WHAT IS GOING ON?

I HAVE A GUESS. COME ON!



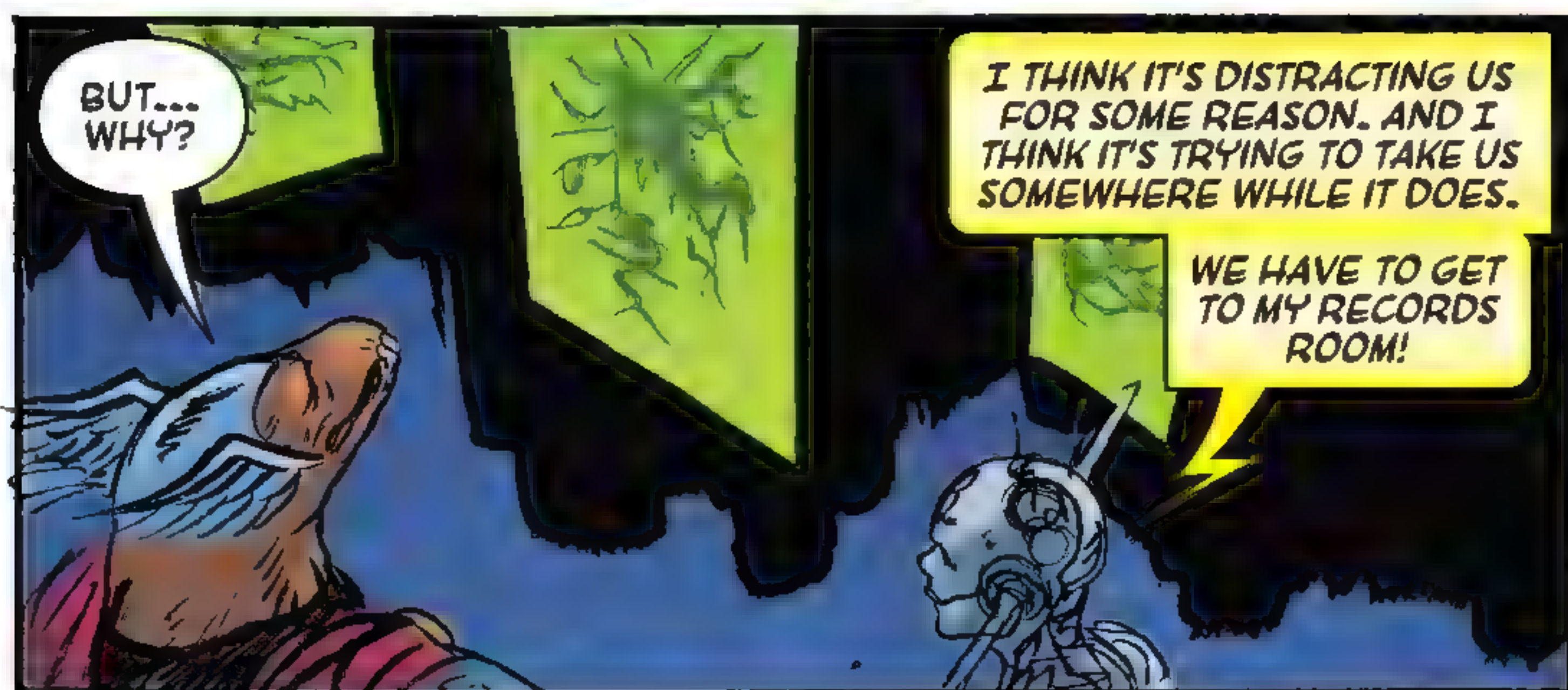
LOOK AT ALL THE MAIN TUBES, THEY LEAD DOWN THIS HALLWAY...



...AND CONVERGE HERE.

THE RECORDS ROOM.

I THINK THIS THING IS TOYING WITH US VIA OUR EXPERIENCES TOGETHER. IT'S REPLAYING OUR MEMORIES FOR US.



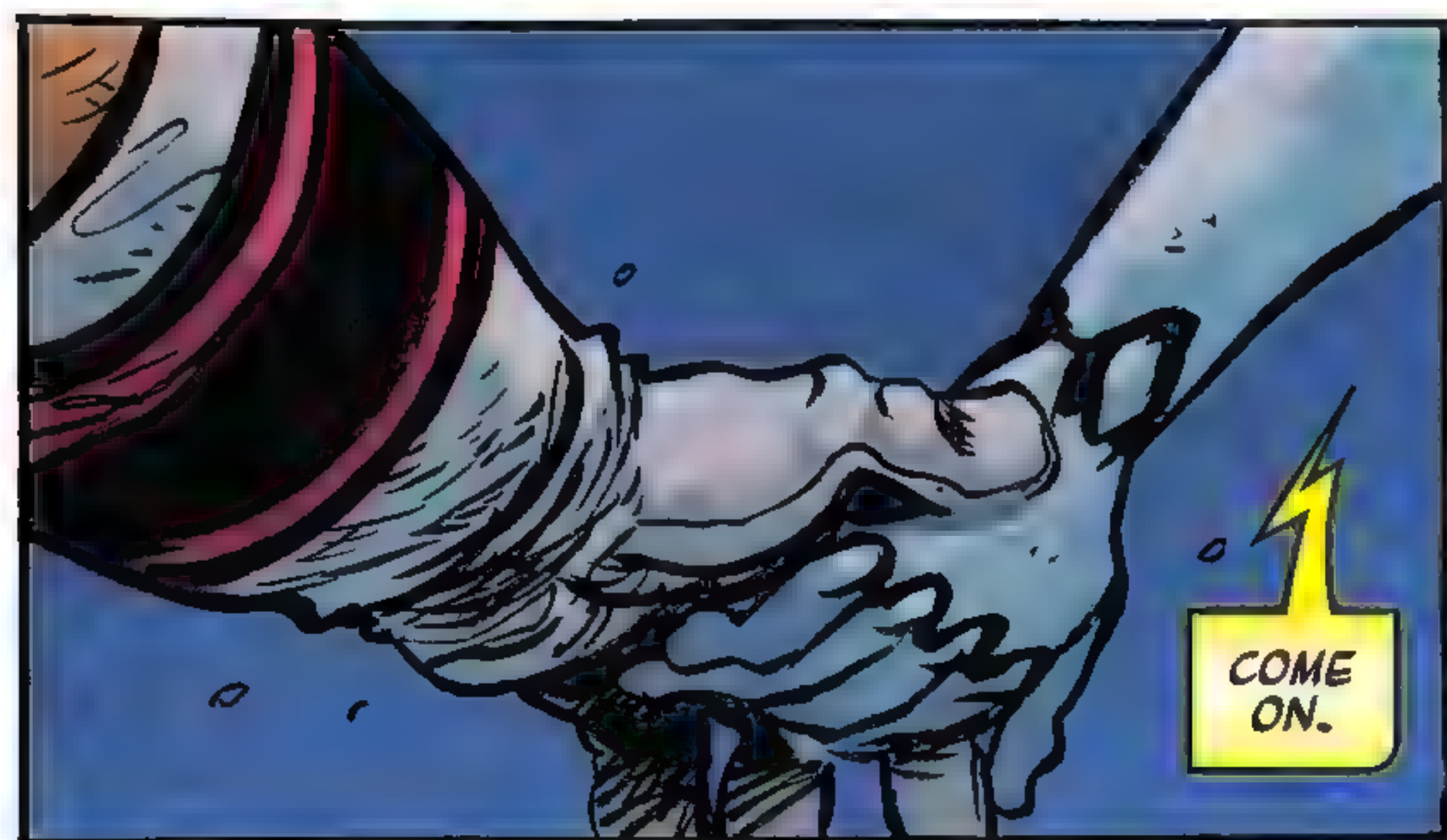
BUT... WHY?

I THINK IT'S DISTRACTING US FOR SOME REASON. AND I THINK IT'S TRYING TO TAKE US SOMEWHERE WHILE IT DOES.

WE HAVE TO GET TO MY RECORDS ROOM!



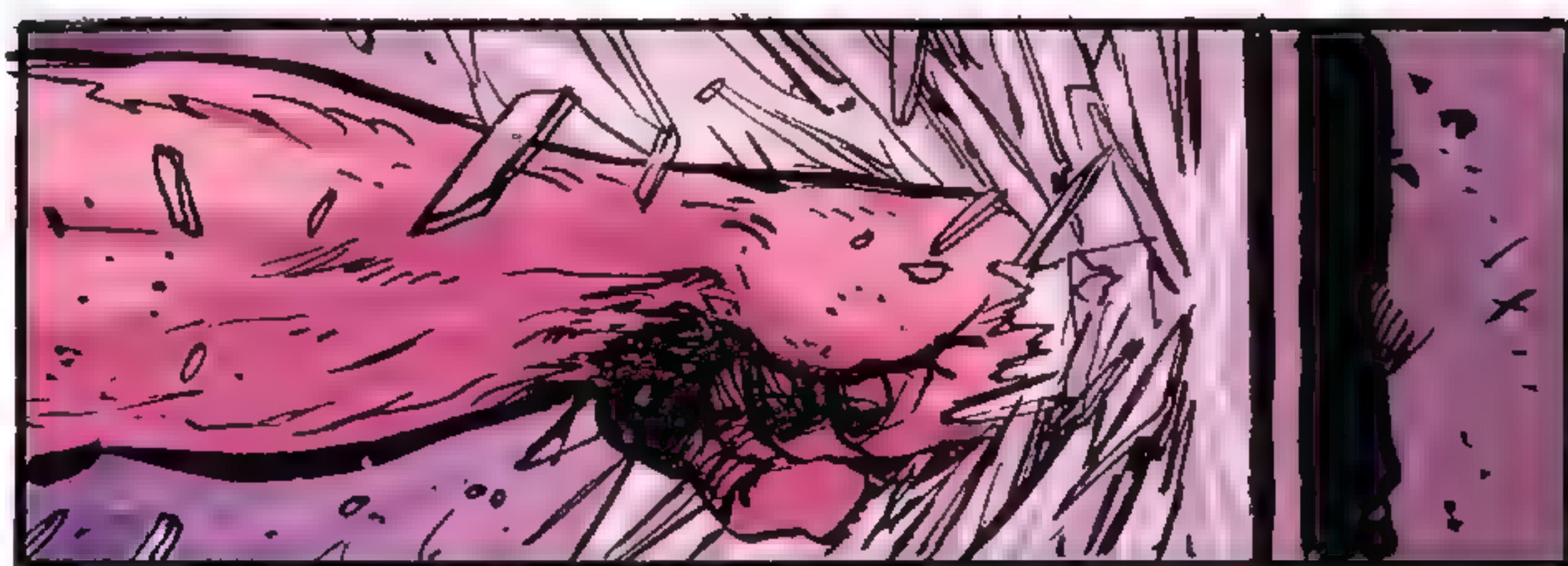
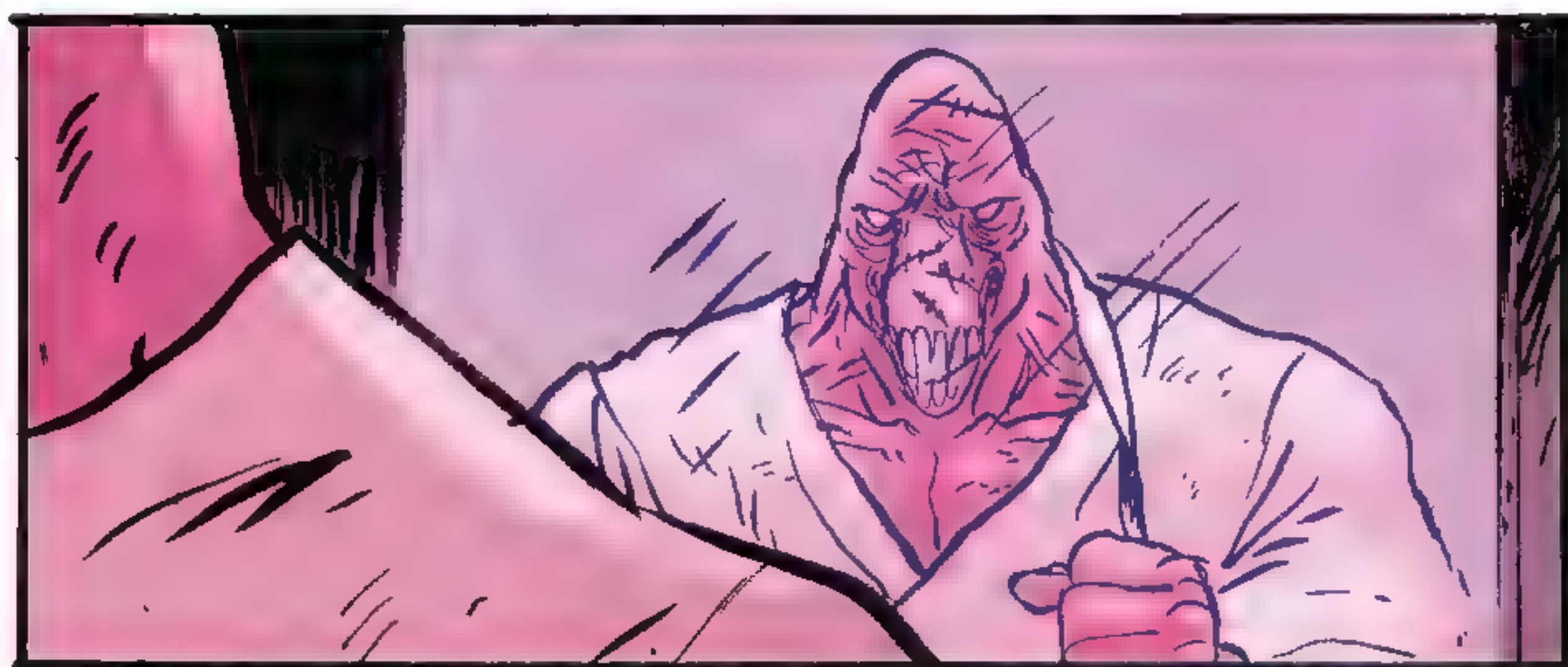
BUT IF EVERY ROOM IS LIKE THE ONE WE JUST CAME OUT OF, WHO KNOWS WHAT'S IN THE NEXT ONE?

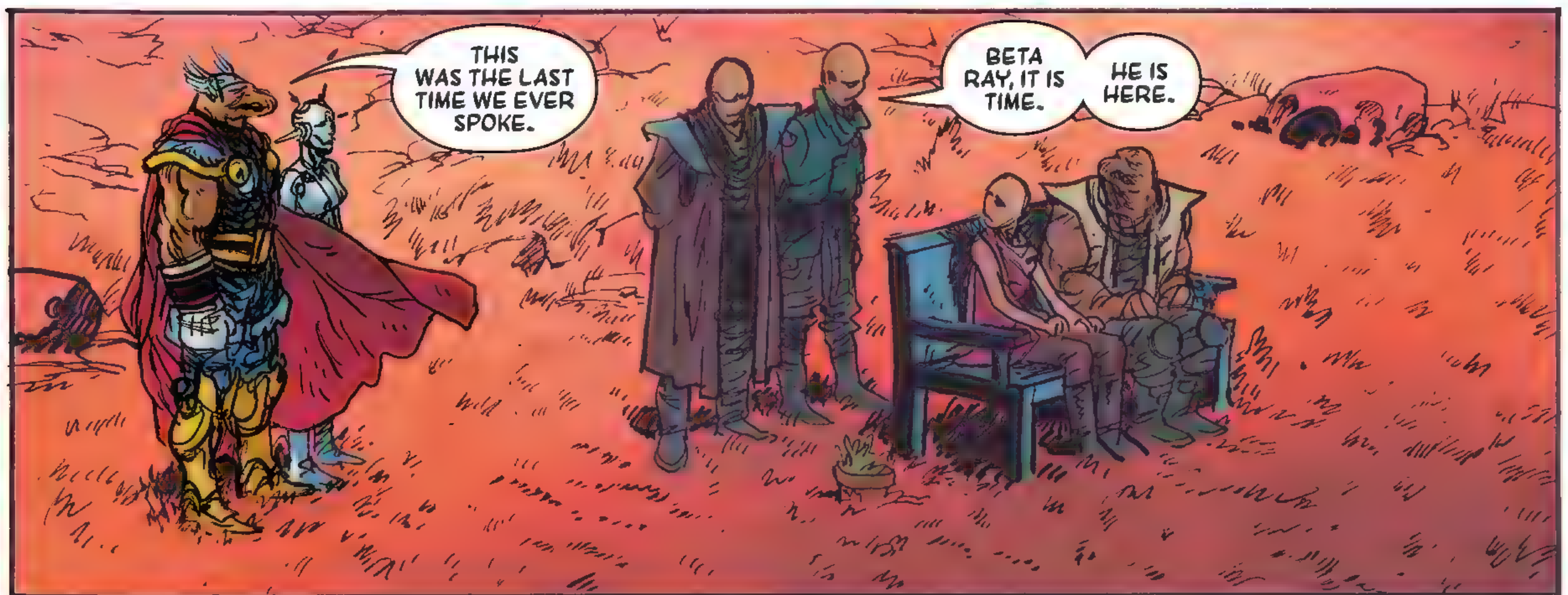
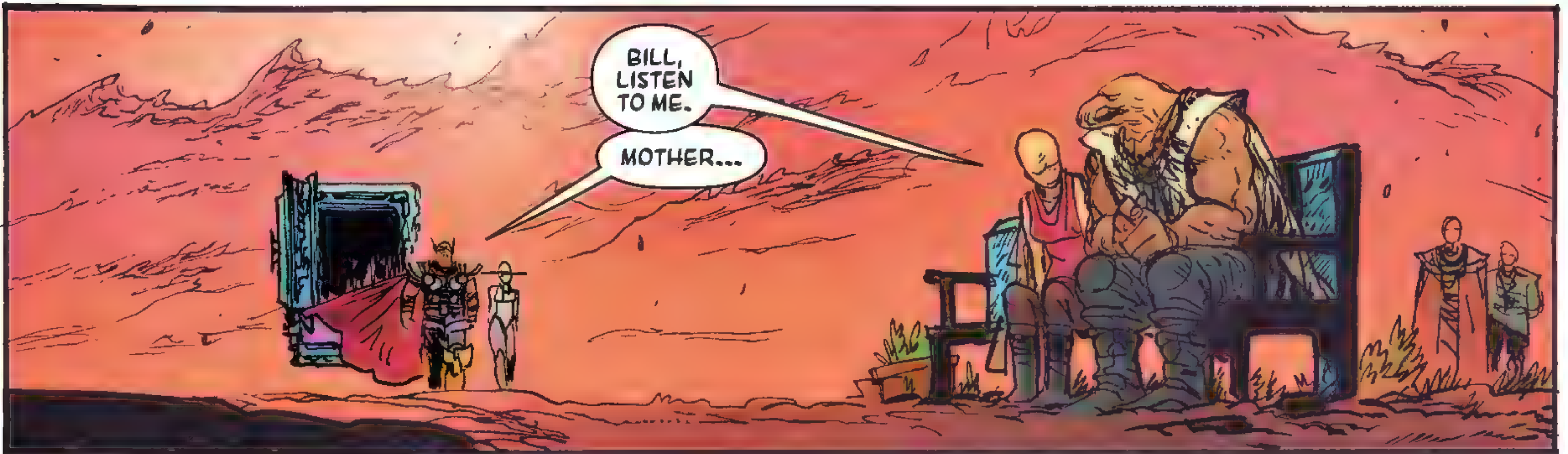


COME ON.



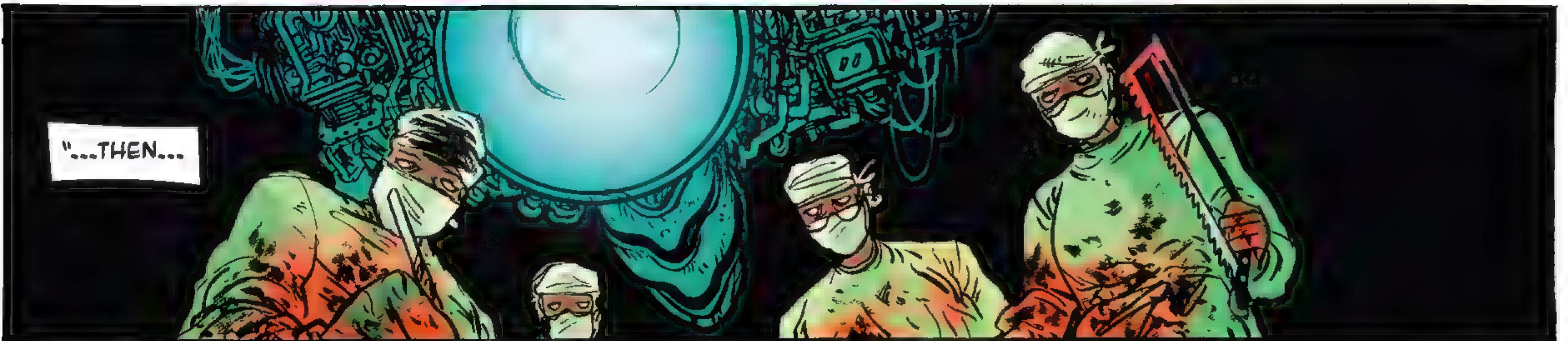
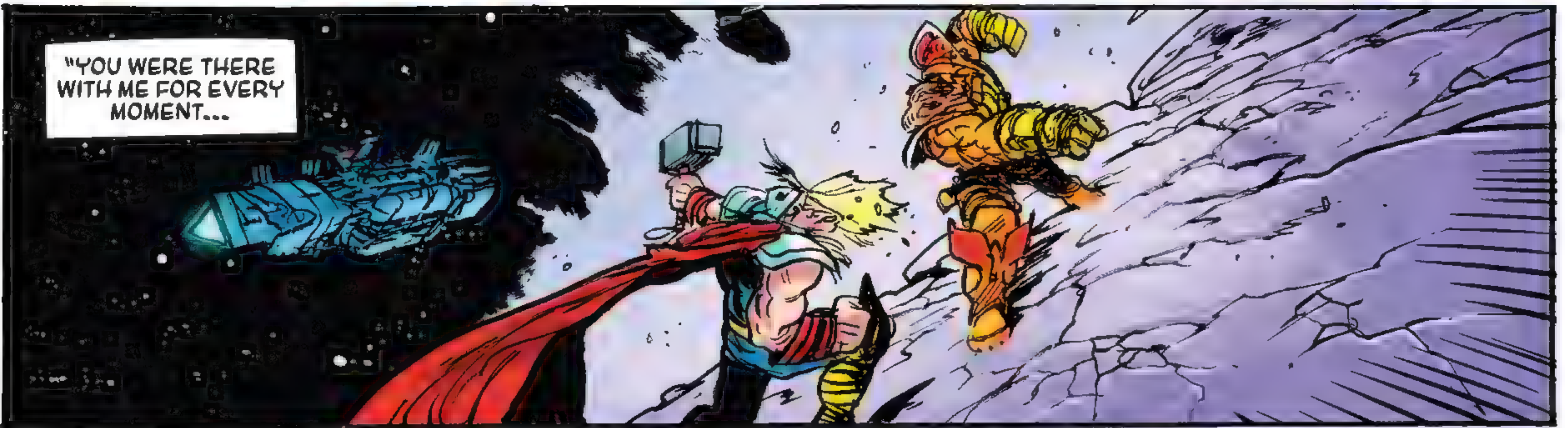
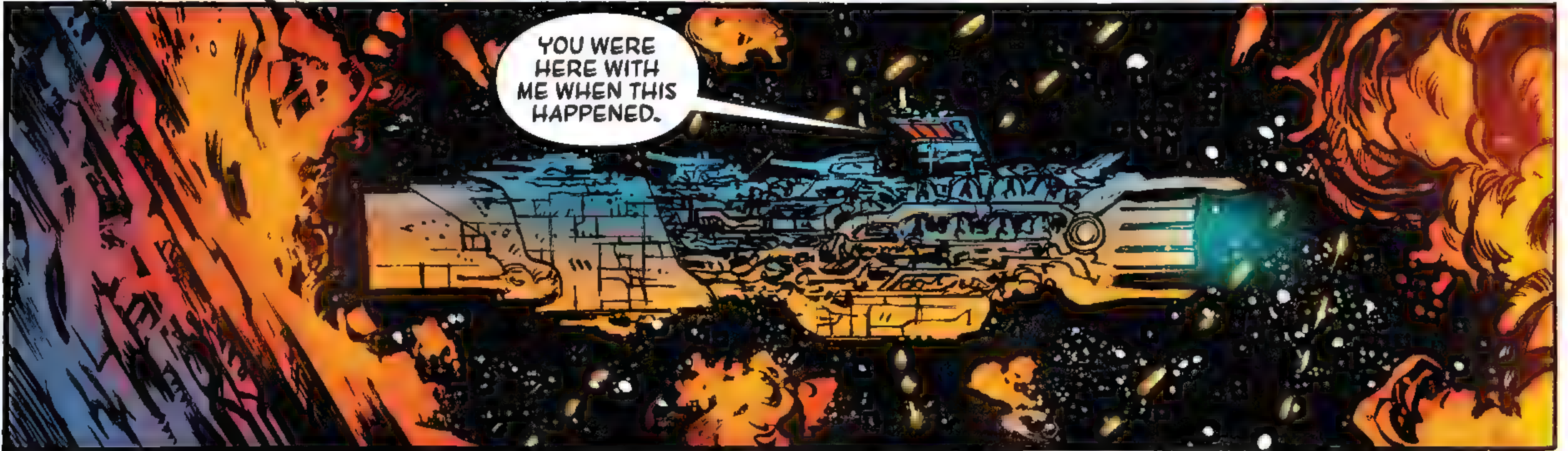
THE ONLY WAY IS FORWARD.

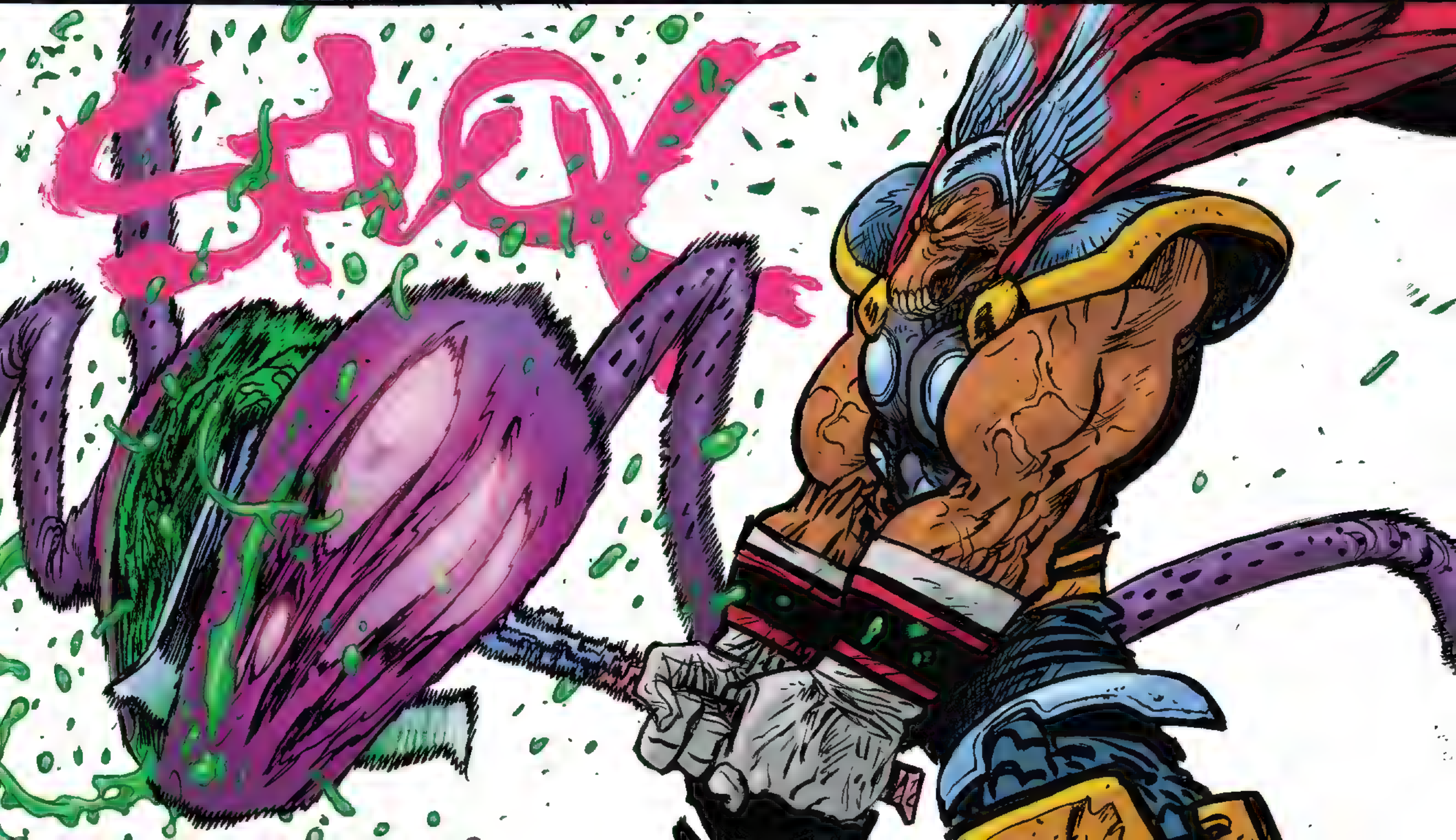




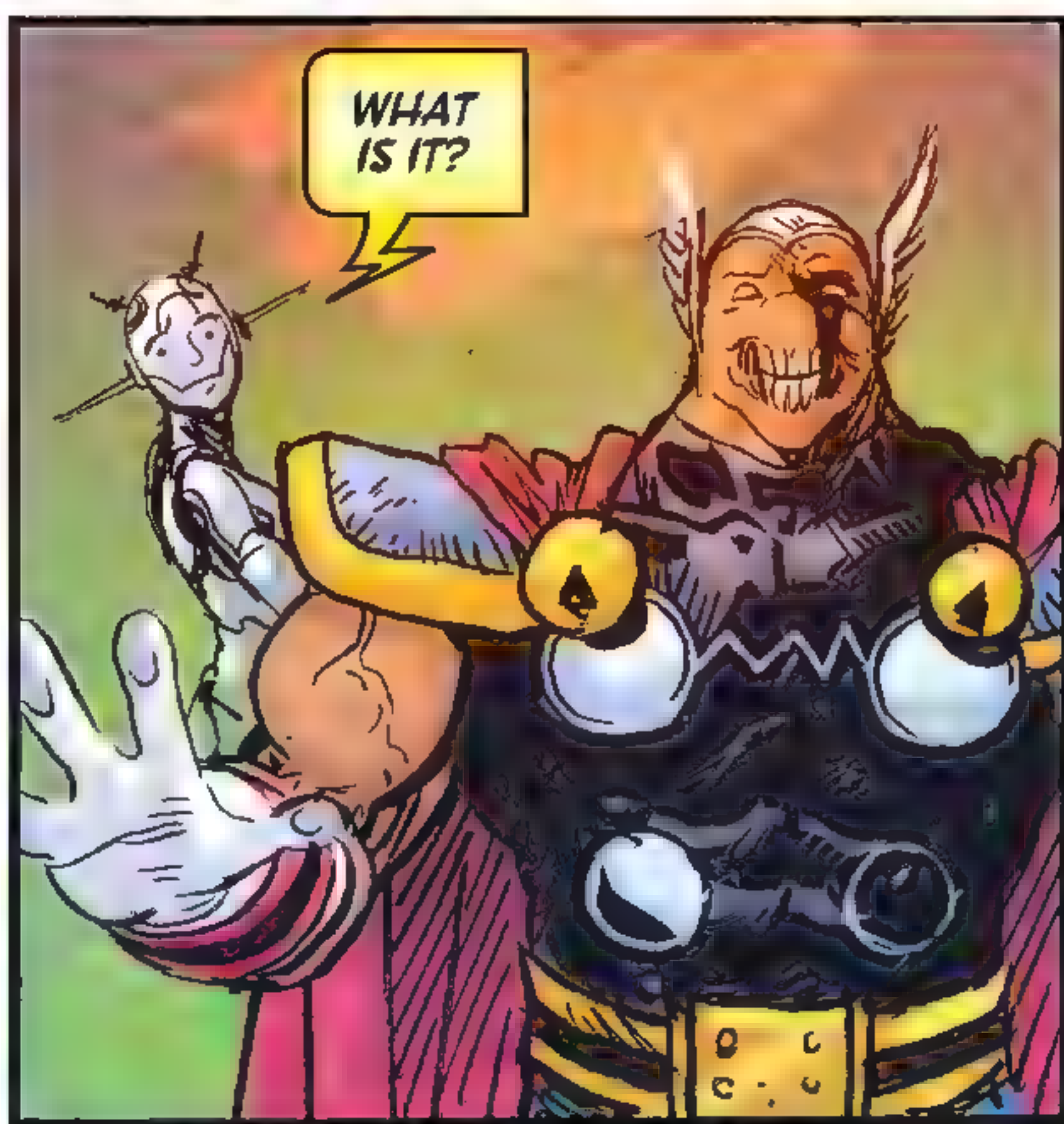
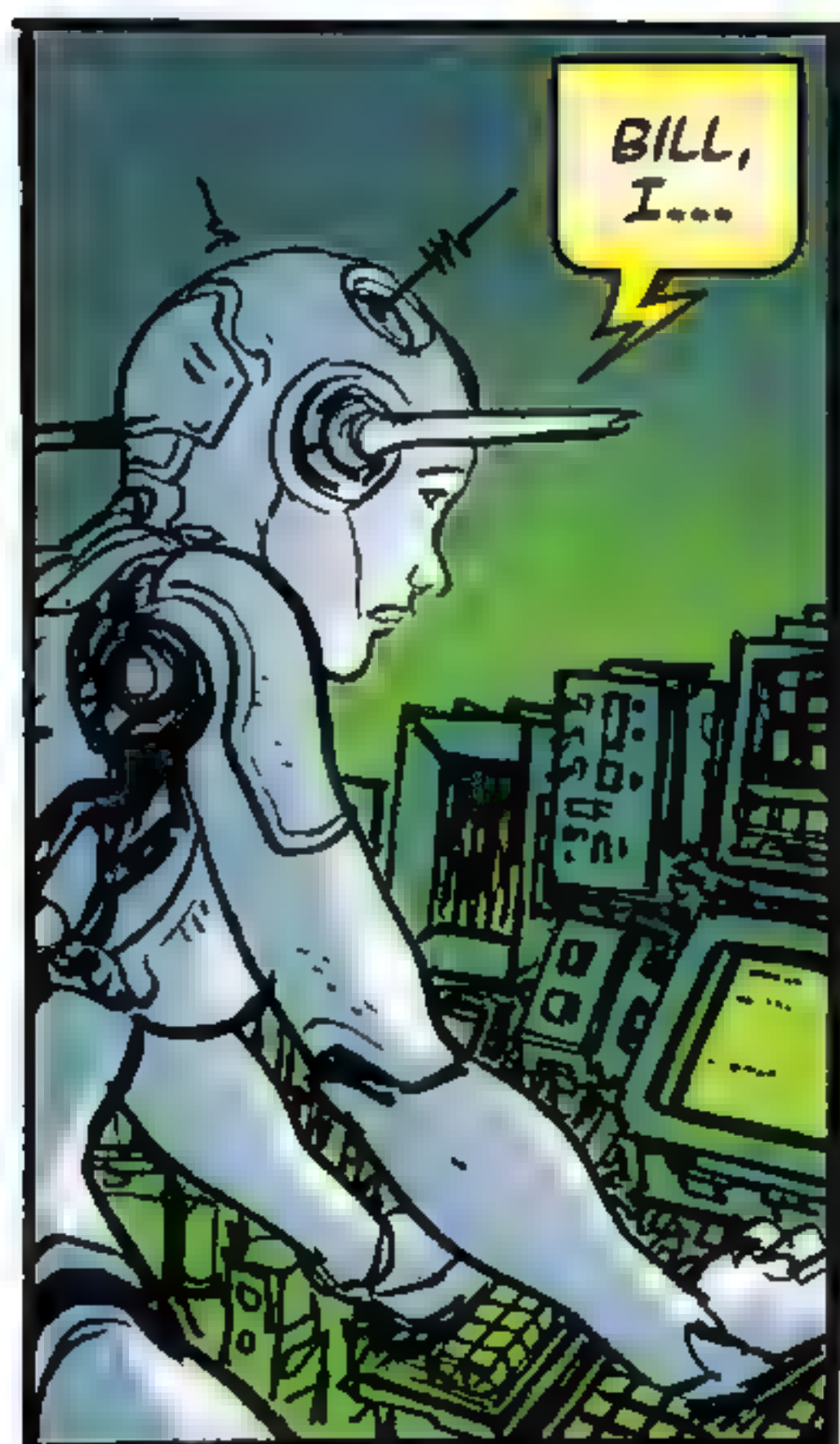
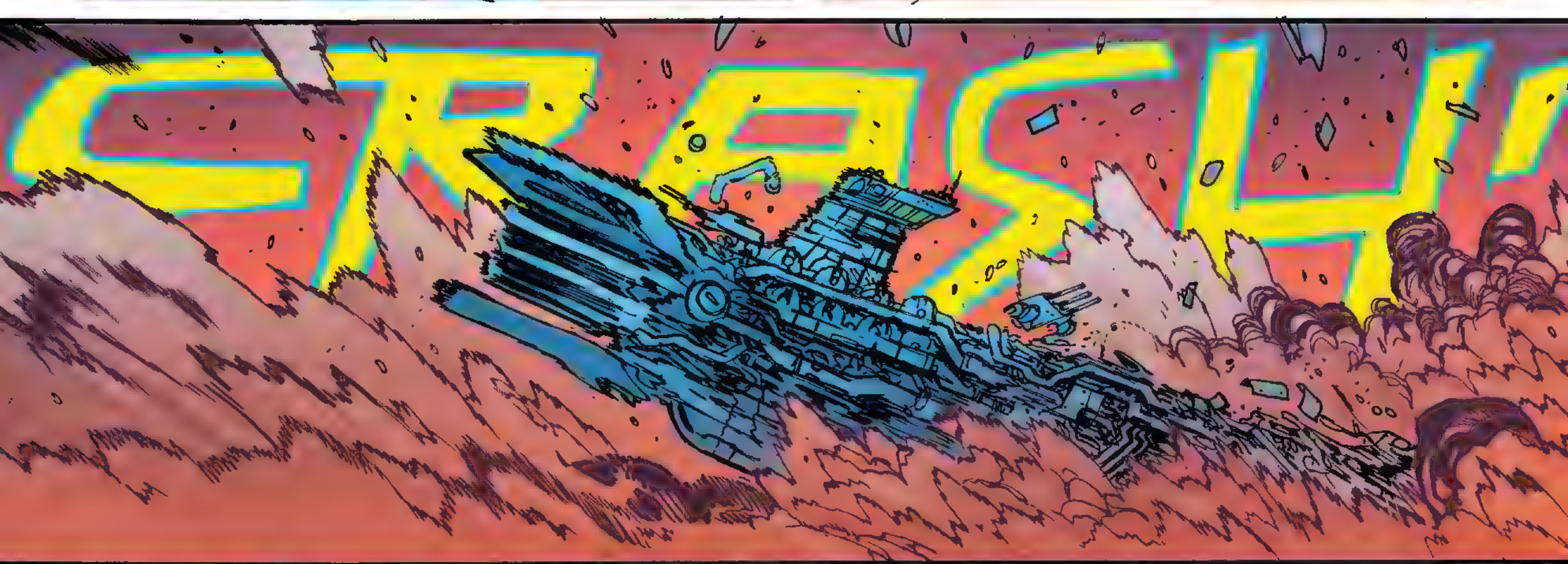
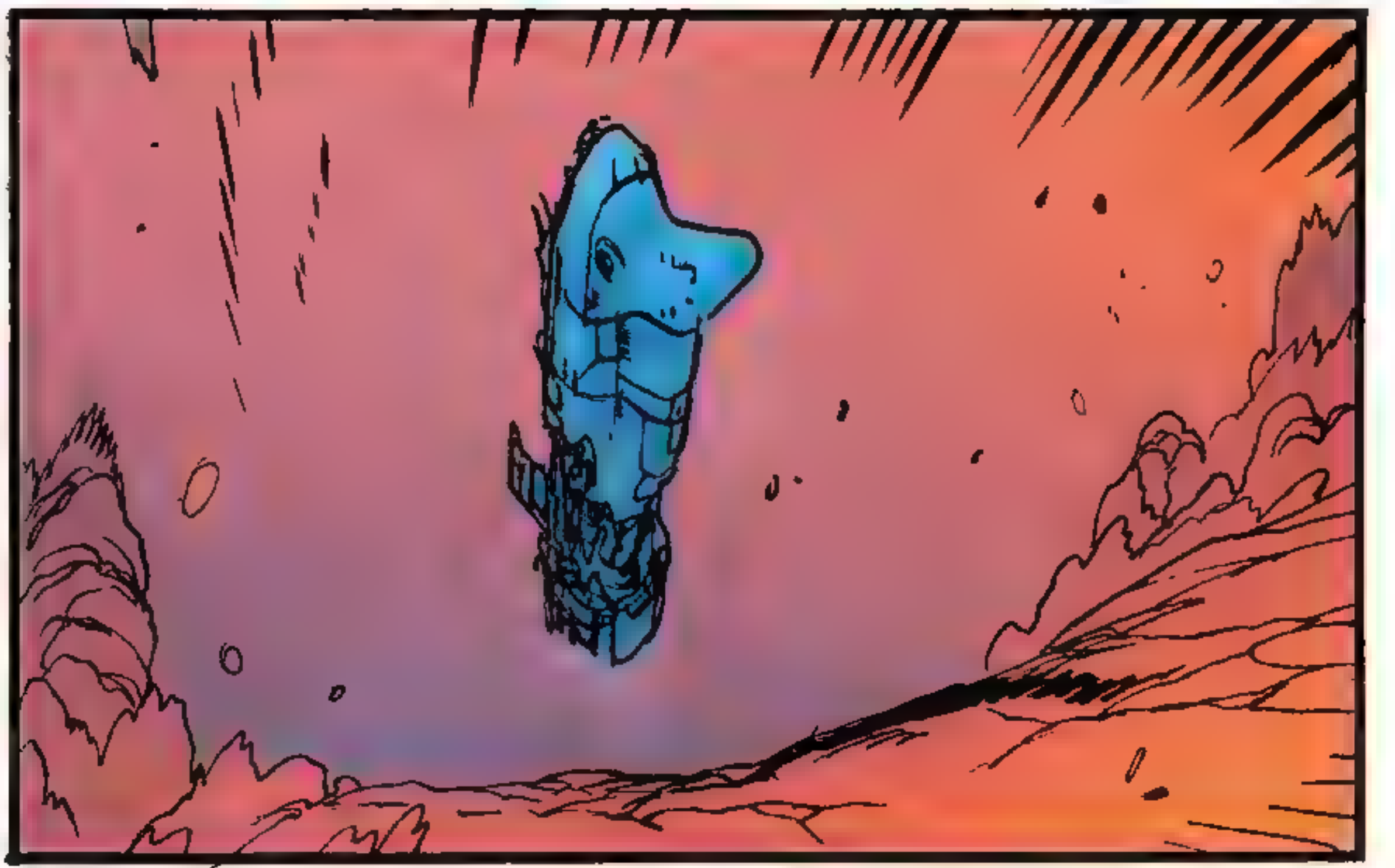
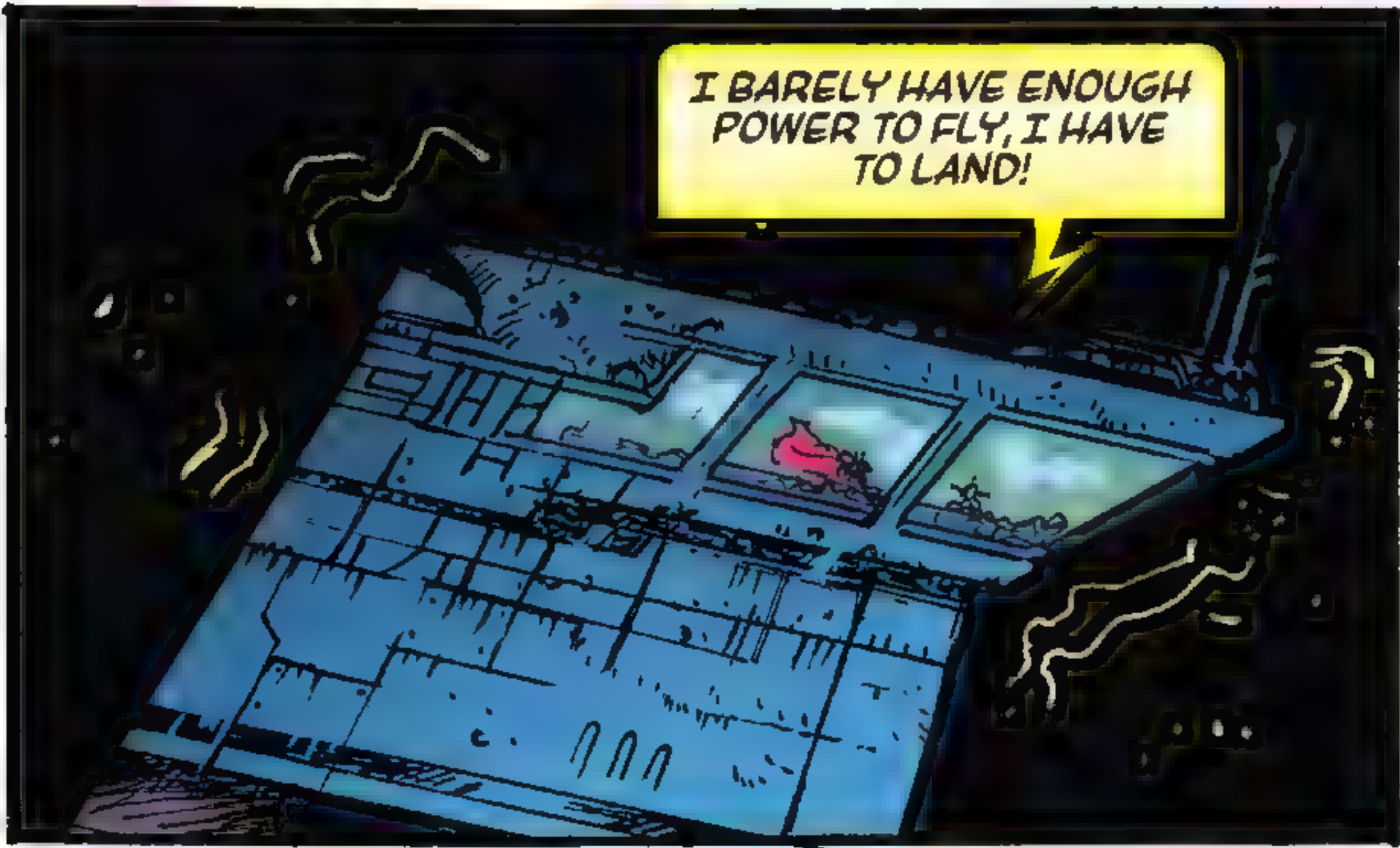
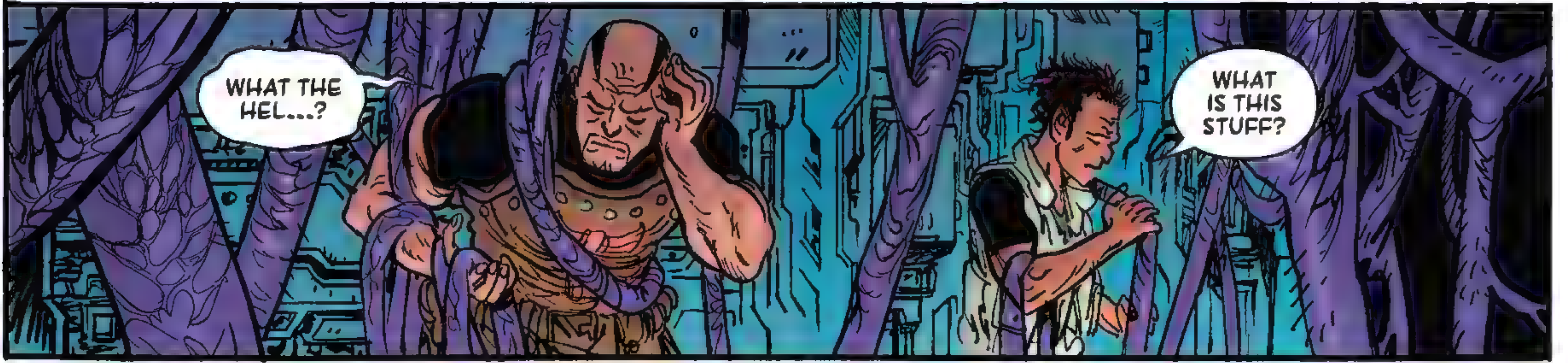


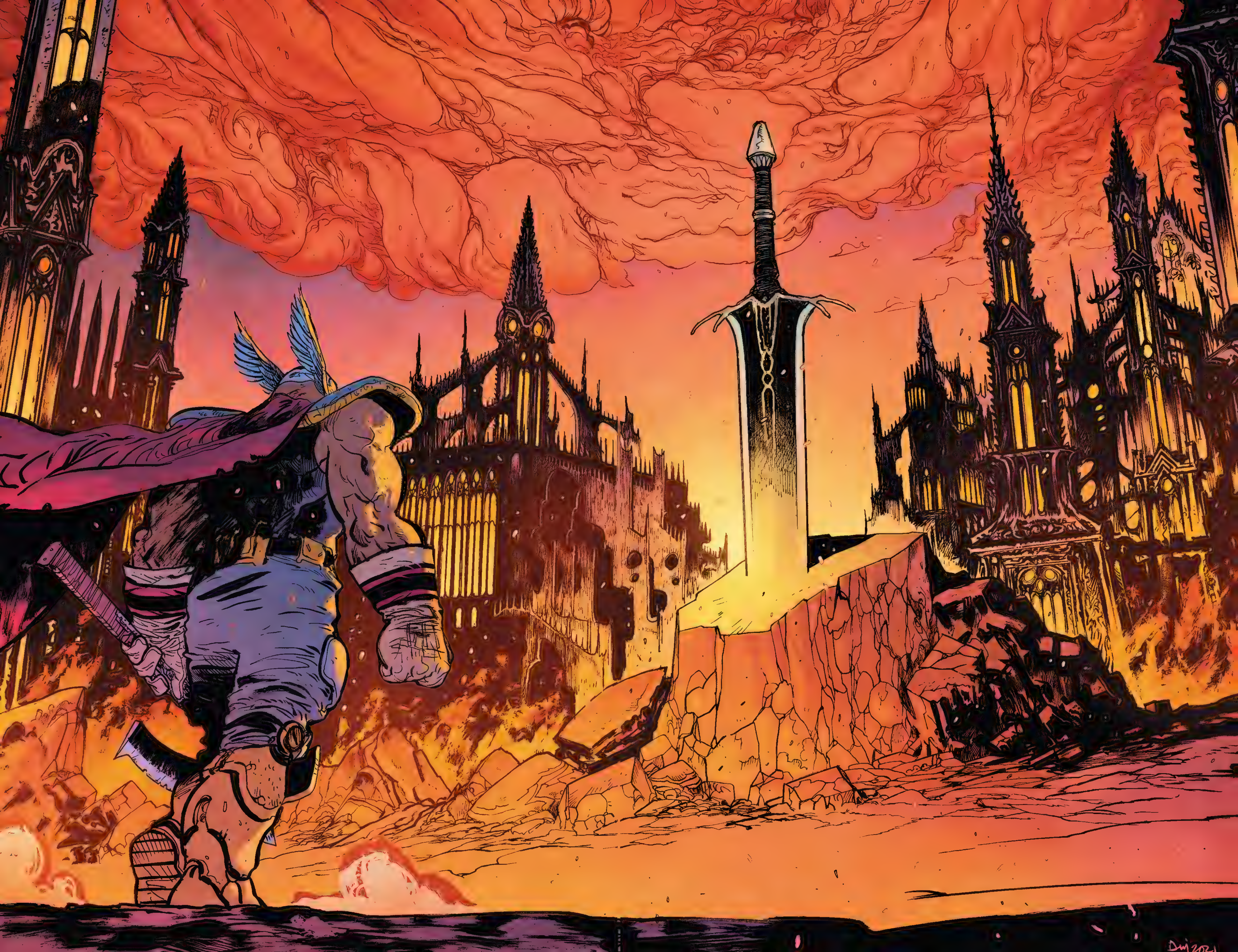
BEFORE
THE FIRE
CAME.





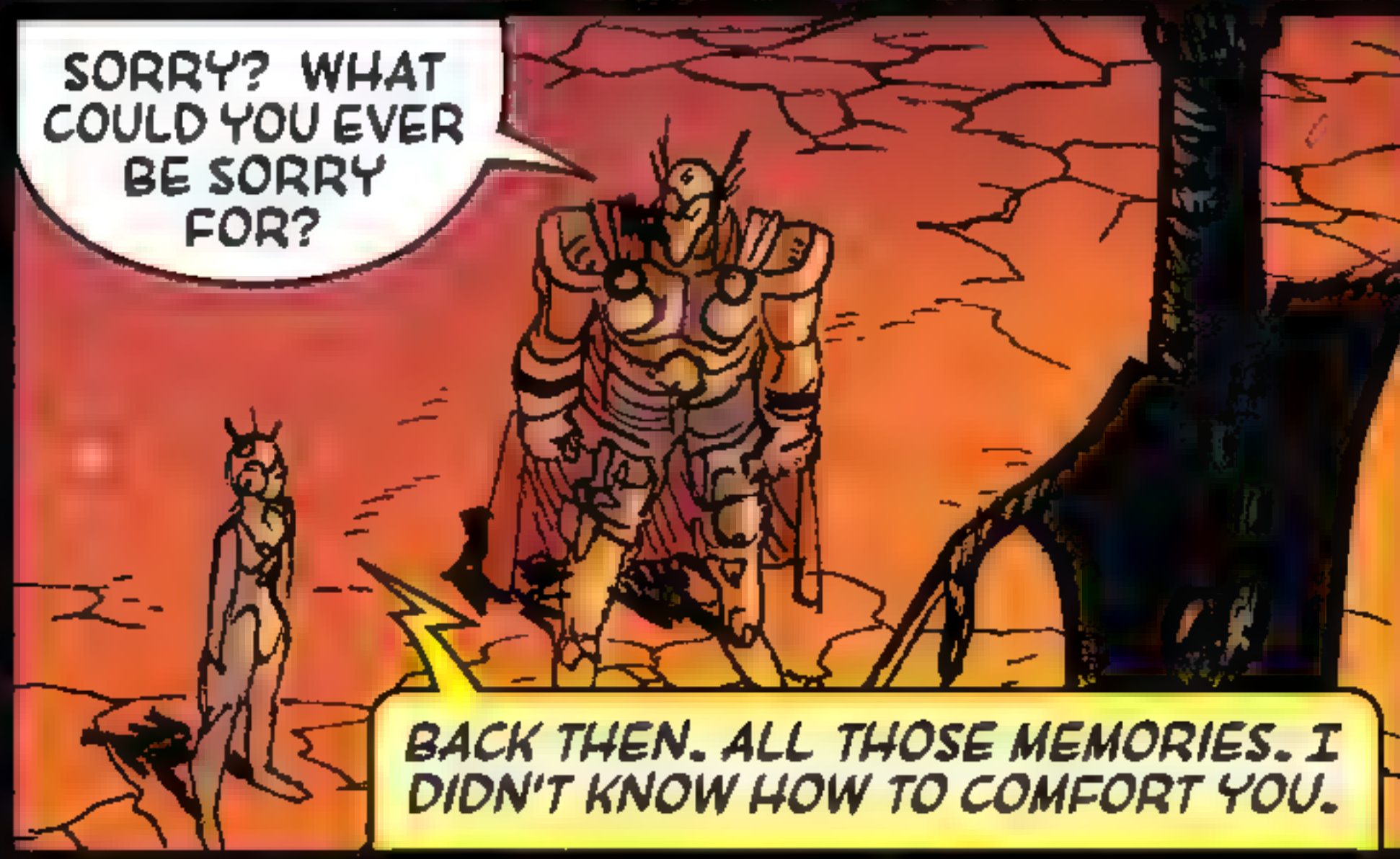






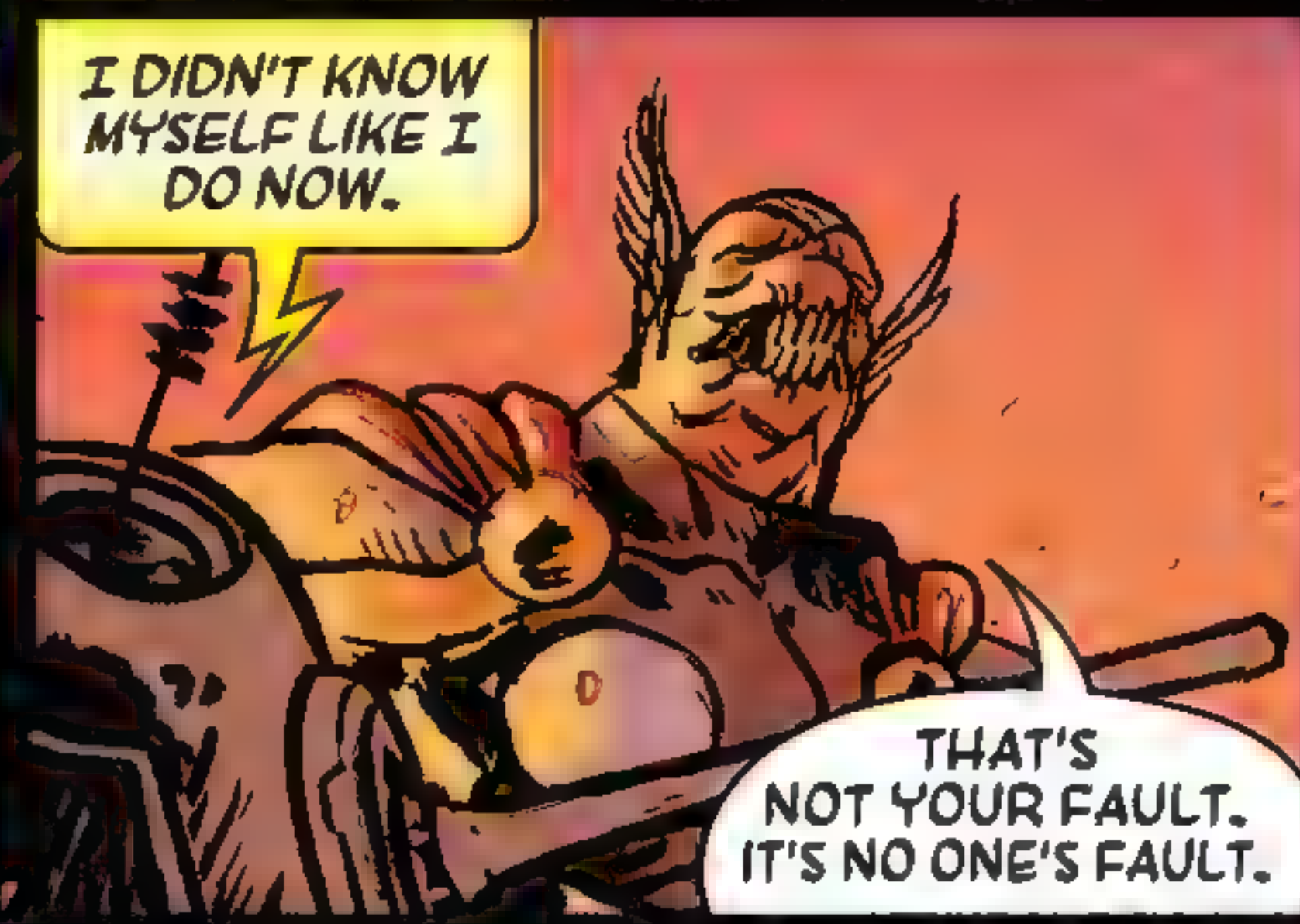


I'M SORRY.



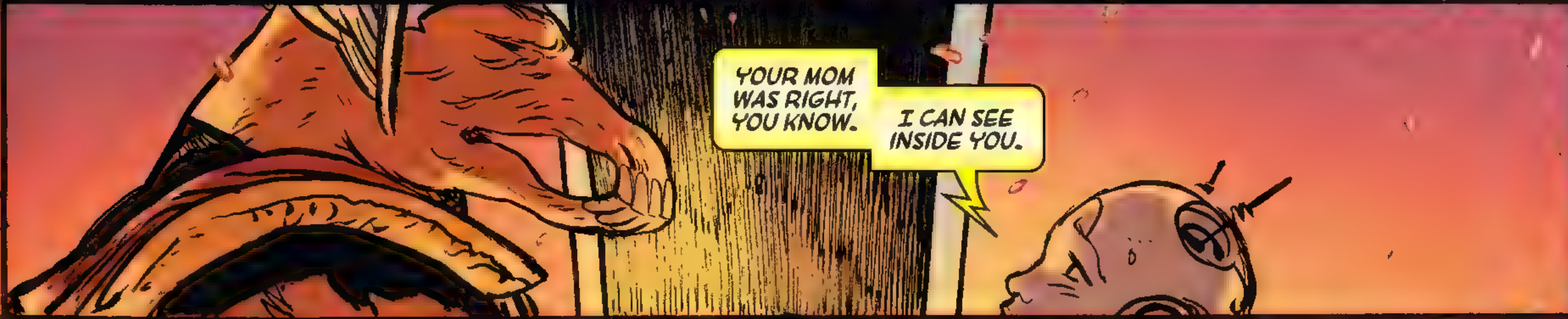
SORRY? WHAT COULD YOU EVER BE SORRY FOR?

BACK THEN. ALL THOSE MEMORIES. I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO COMFORT YOU.



I DIDN'T KNOW MYSELF LIKE I DO NOW.

THAT'S NOT YOUR FAULT. IT'S NO ONE'S FAULT.



YOUR MOM WAS RIGHT, YOU KNOW.

I CAN SEE INSIDE YOU.



YOU'RE RADIANT.

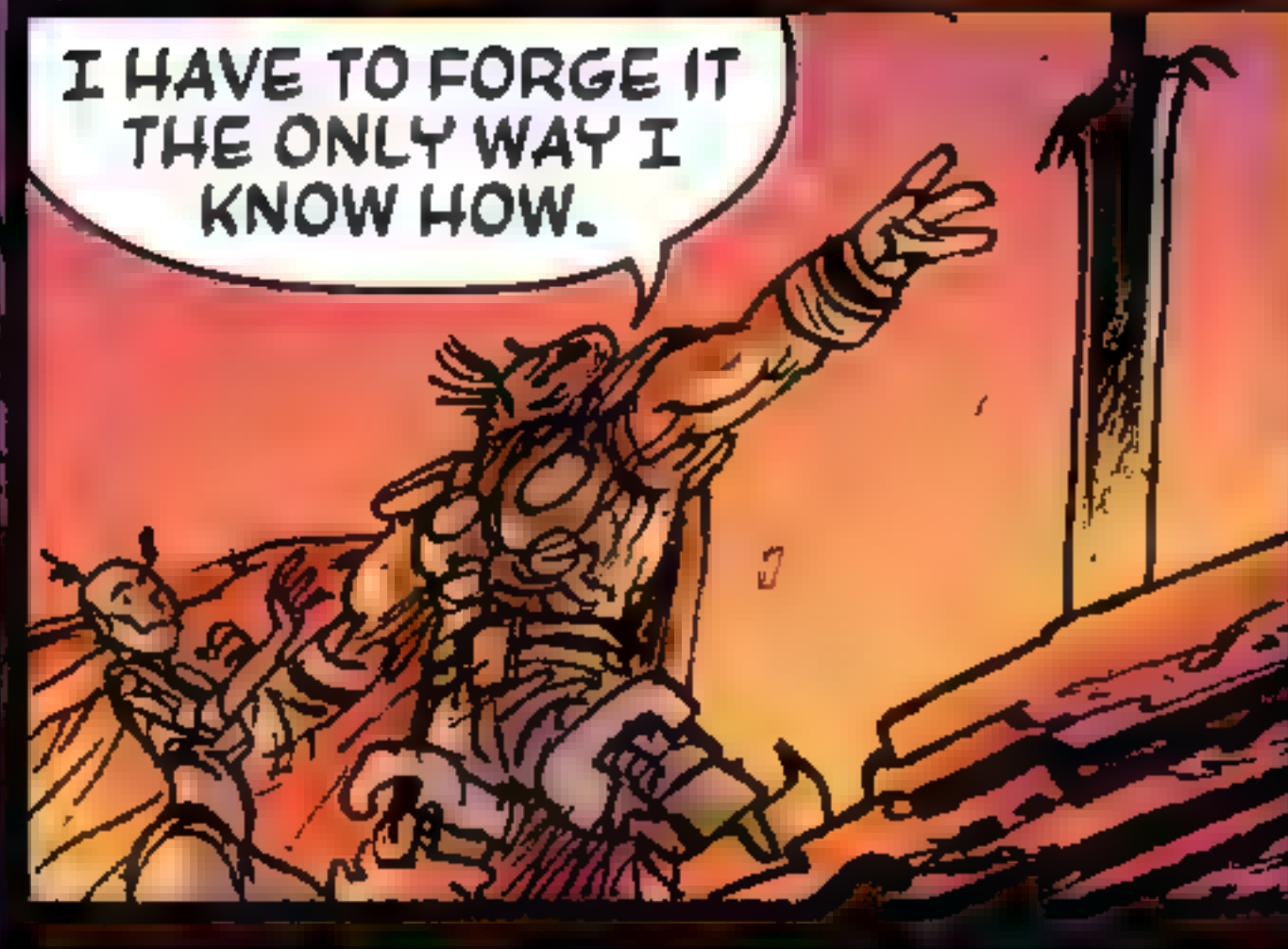
AND YOU NEVER NEEDED A HAMMER OR A SWORD TO PROVE IT.



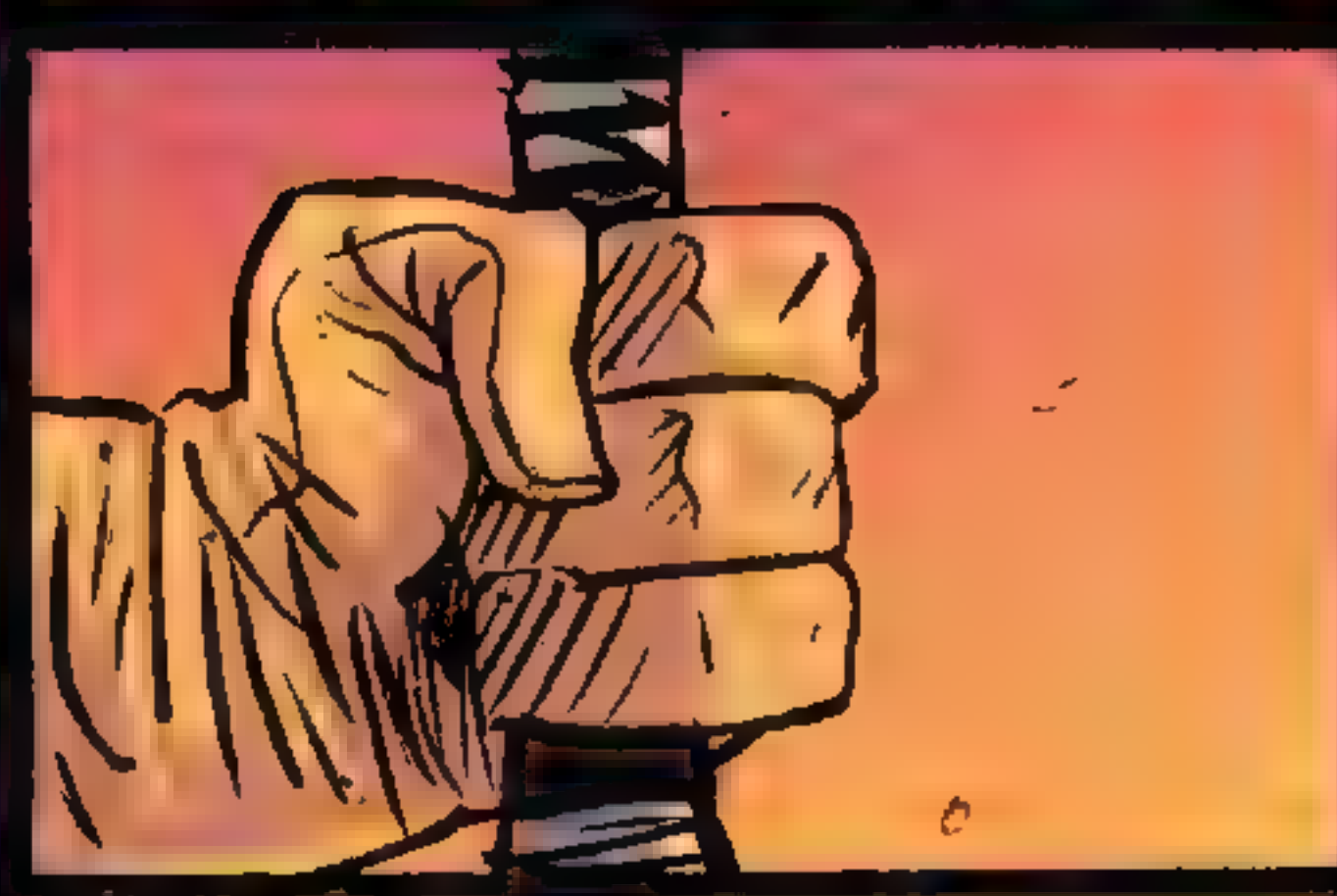
I WISH I COULD BELIEVE THAT.

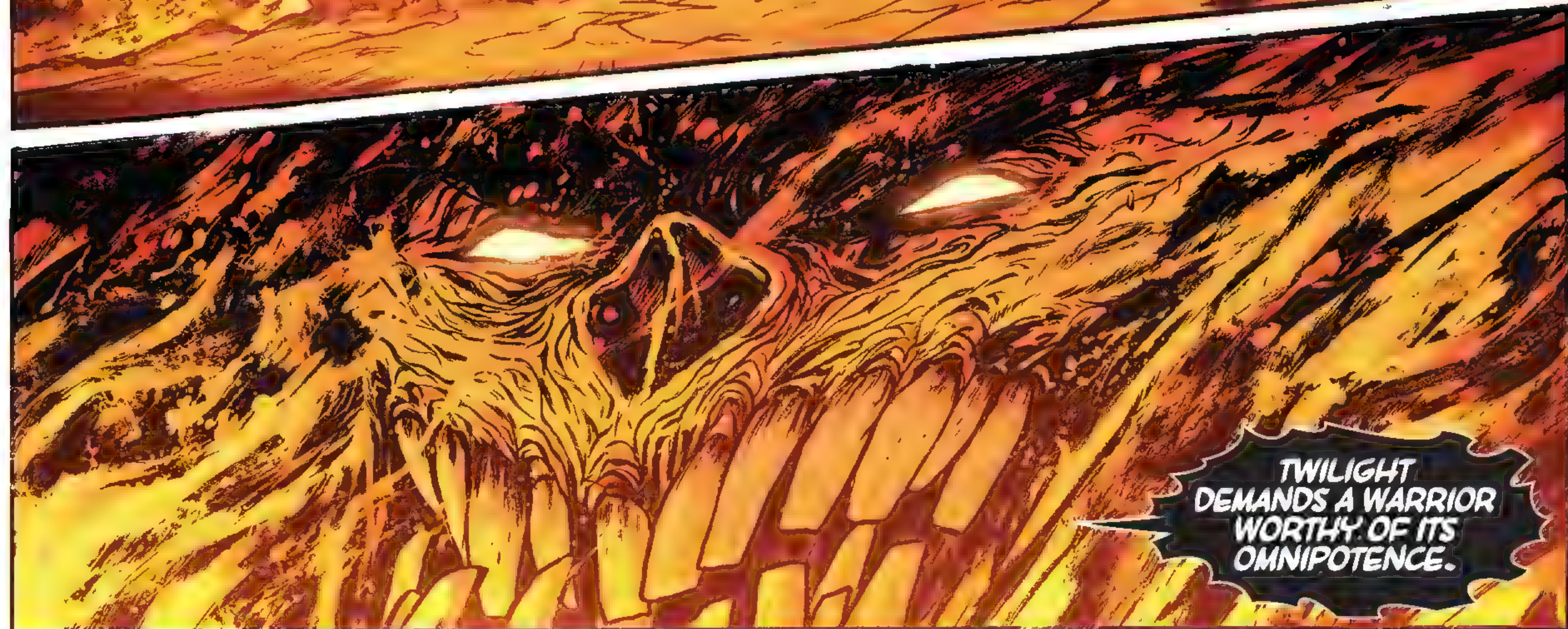
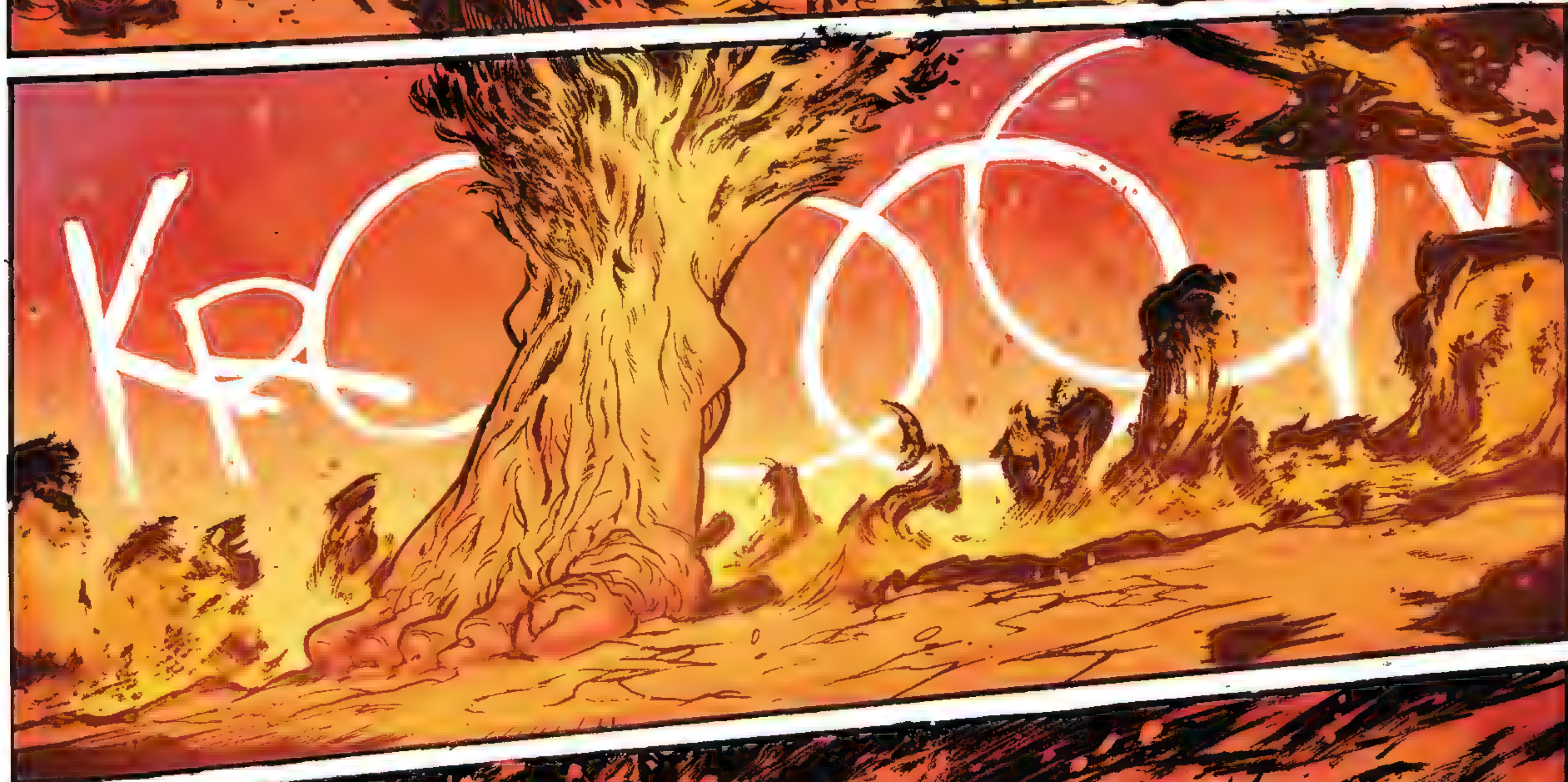
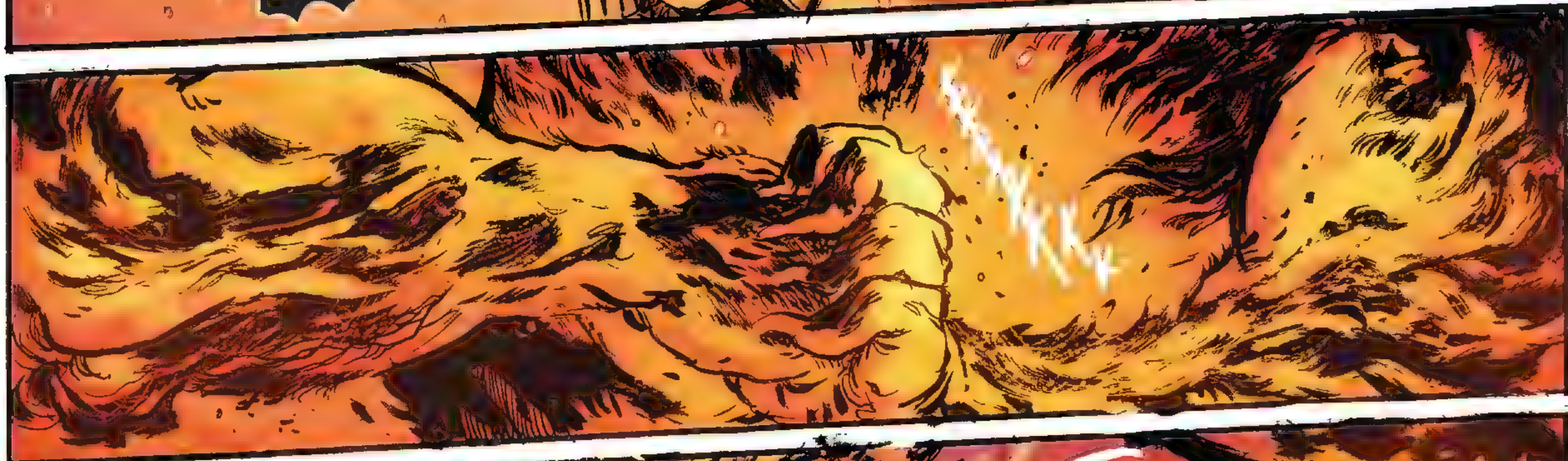
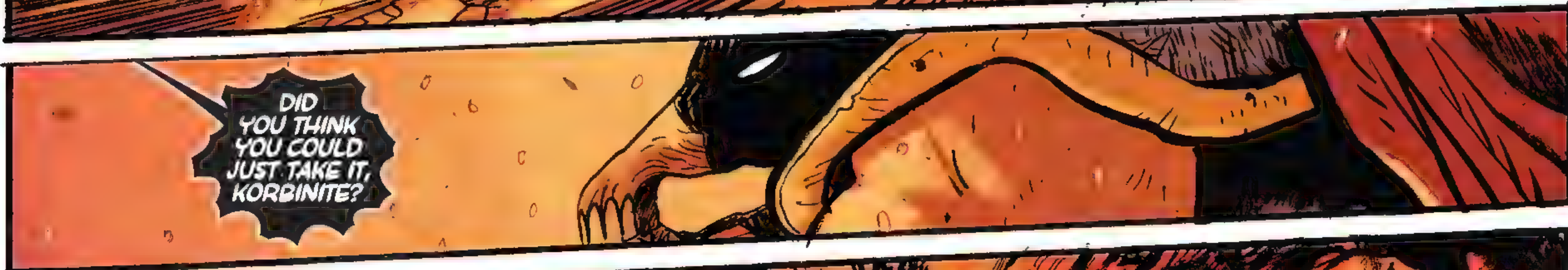


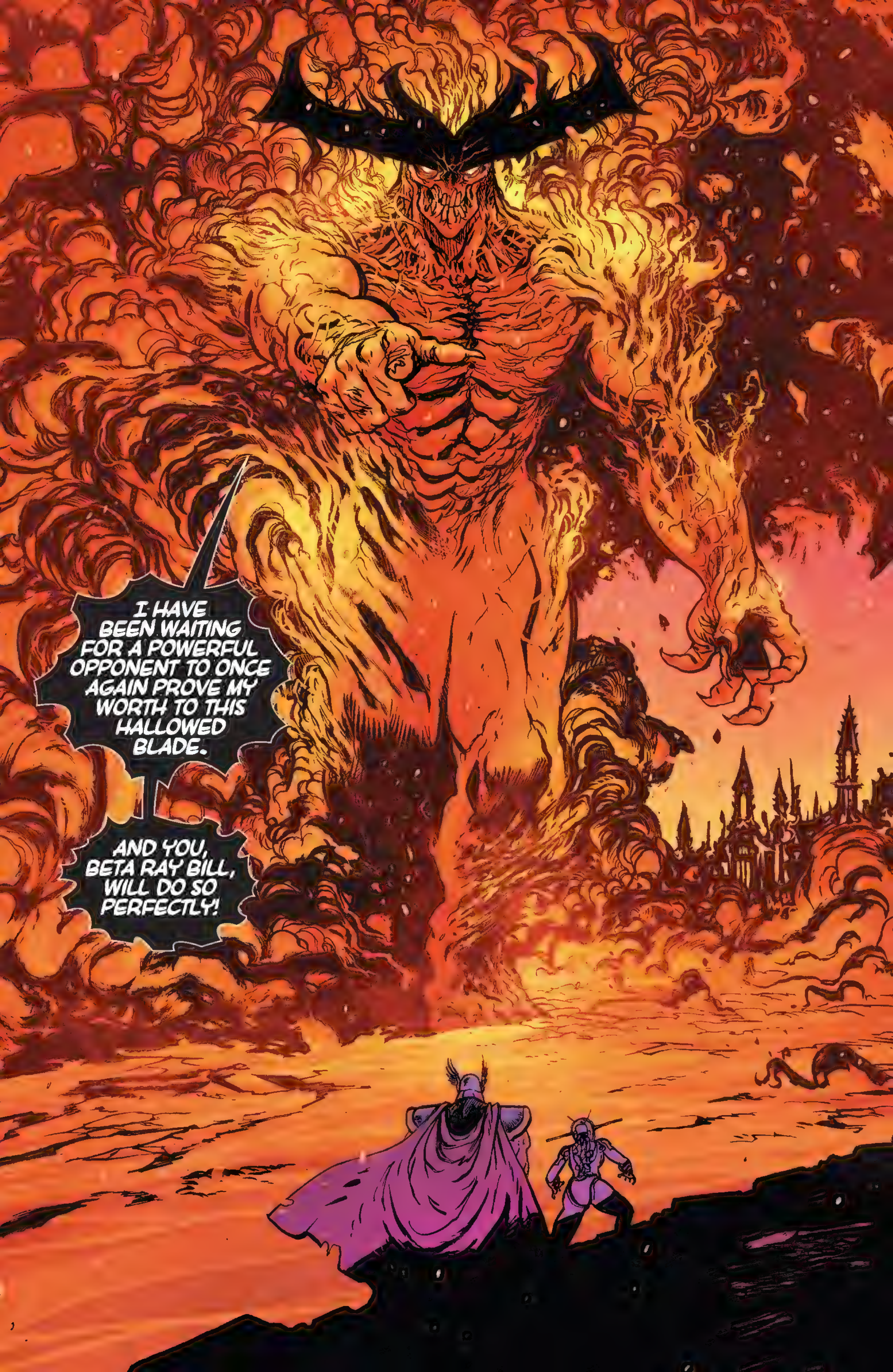
BUT...I'VE NEVER FELT THAT INSIDE. I WISH I COULD SEE IT. BUT I CAN'T.



I HAVE TO FORGE IT THE ONLY WAY I KNOW HOW.







I HAVE
BEEN WAITING
FOR A POWERFUL
OPPONENT TO ONCE
AGAIN PROVE MY
WORTH TO THIS
HALLOWED
BLADE.

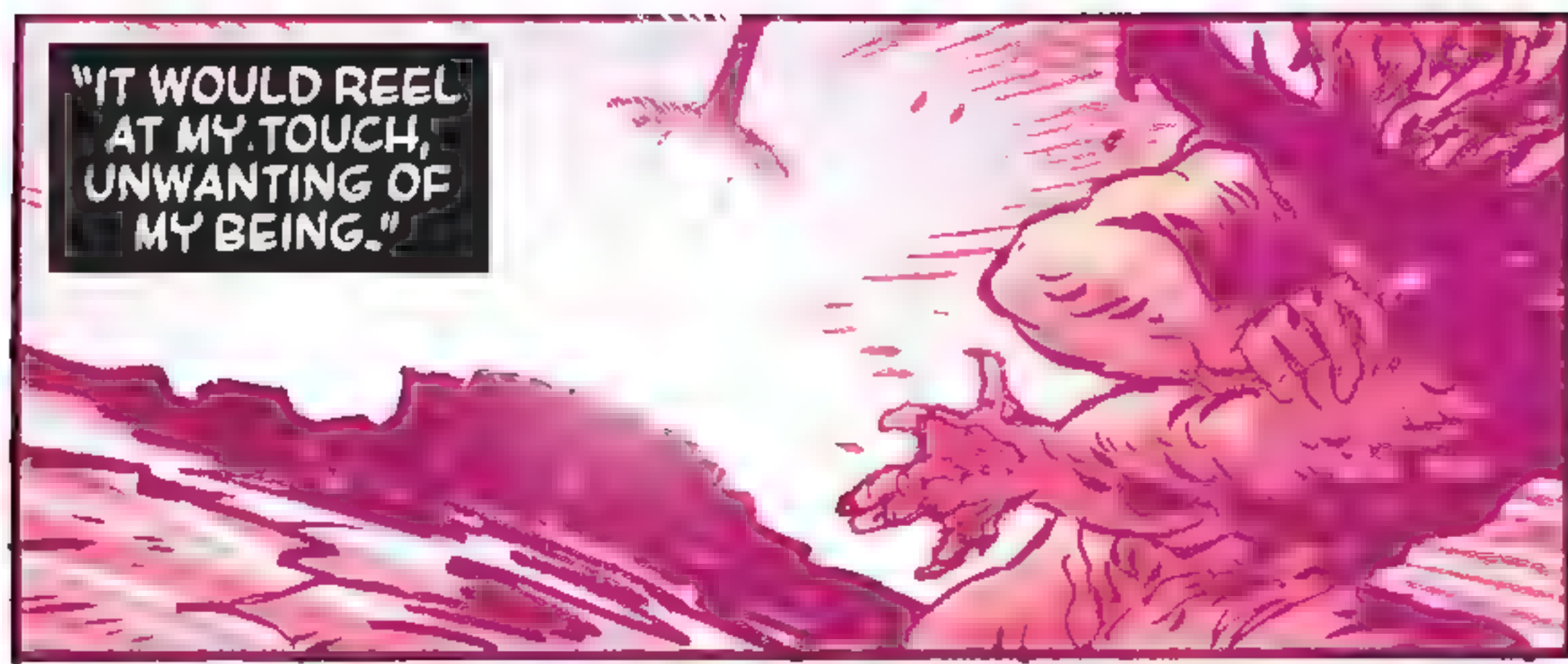
AND YOU,
BETA RAY BILL,
WILL DO SO
PERFECTLY!





SINCE MY
LAST DEFEAT
AT THE HANDS
OF THE CURSED
ASGARDIANS...

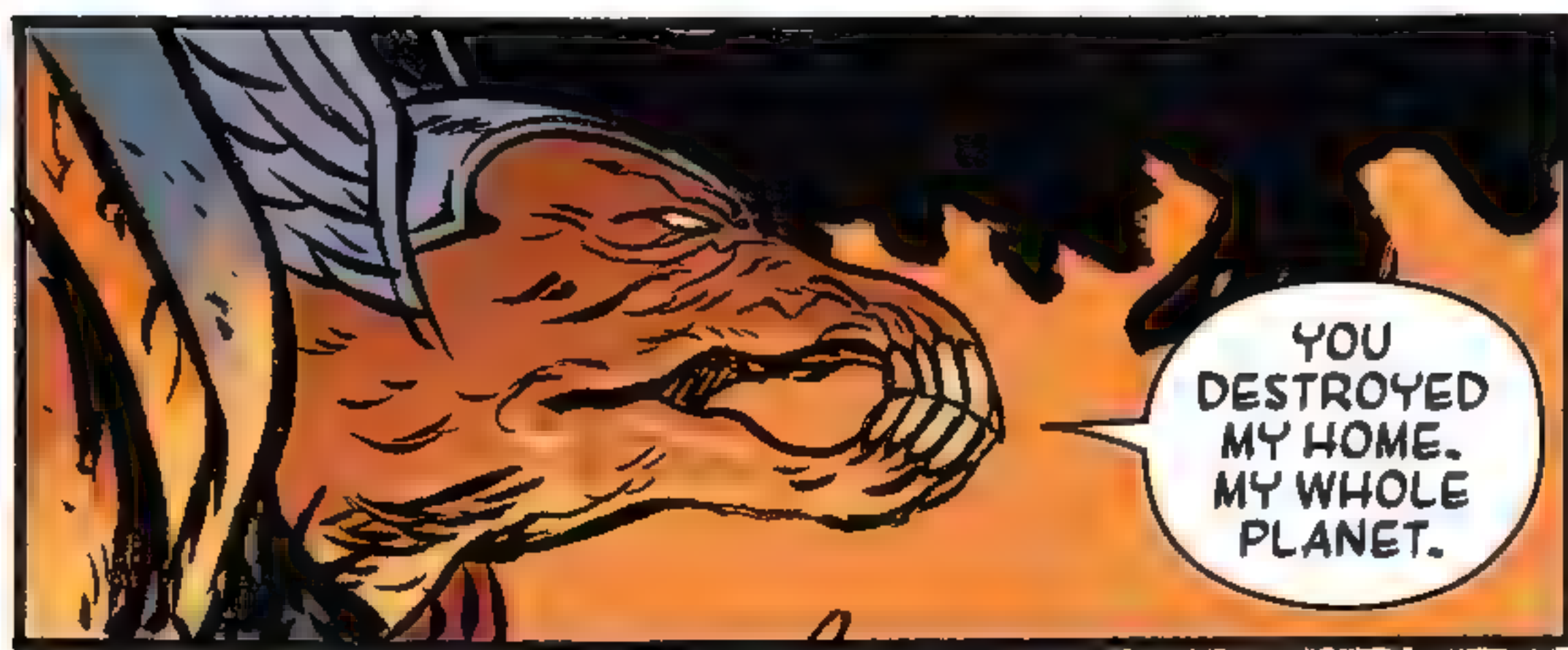
...TWILIGHT
HAS DEEMED
ME UNWORTHY OF
ITS INCREDIBLE
POWER.



"IT WOULD REEL
AT MY TOUCH,
UNWANTING OF
MY BEING."



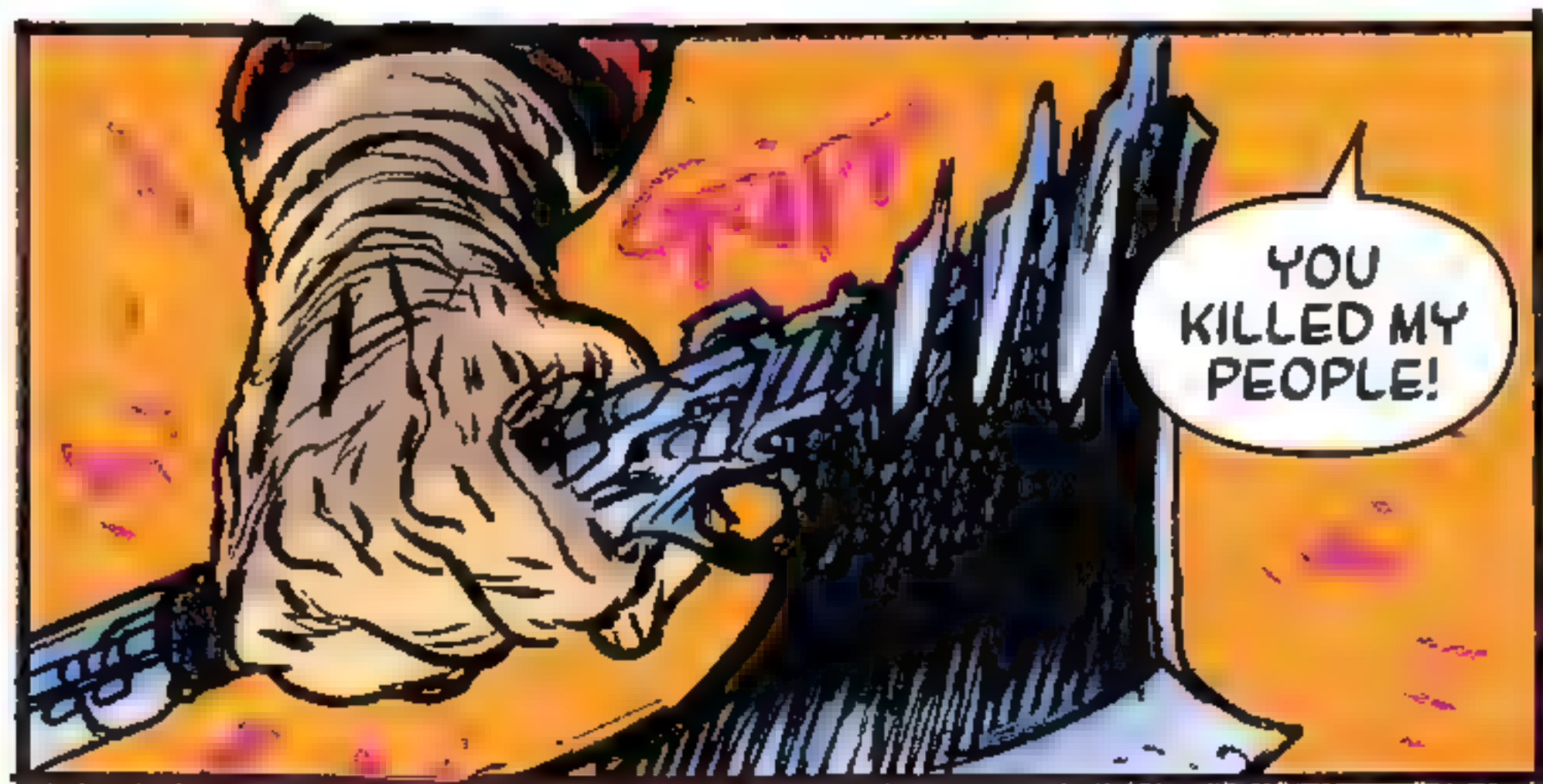
WHILE MY
DAUGHTER SINDR
RULES MUSPELHEIM
IN MY STEAD, I HAVE
BEEN TRAPPED IN THIS
PART OF THE REALM,
WAITING FOR A WARRIOR I
CAN DEFEAT TO PROVE TO
TWILIGHT MY WORTHINESS!



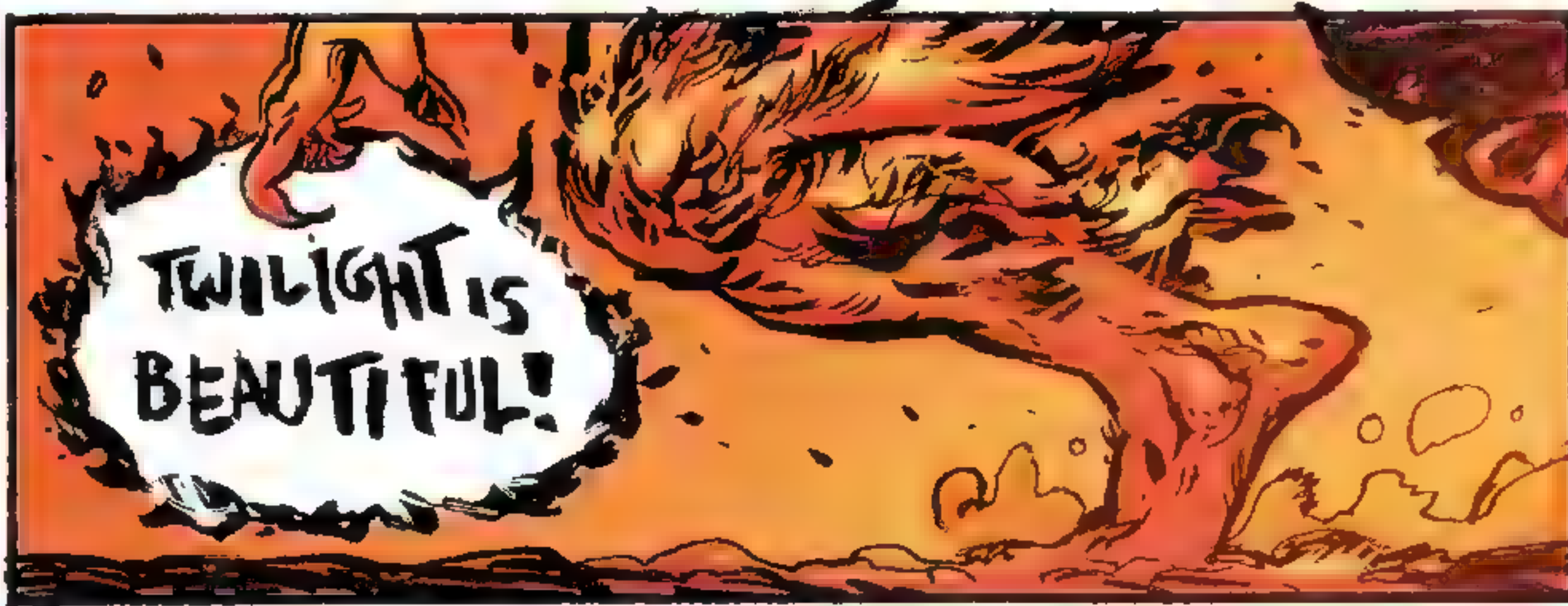
YOU
DESTROYED
MY HOME.
MY WHOLE
PLANET.



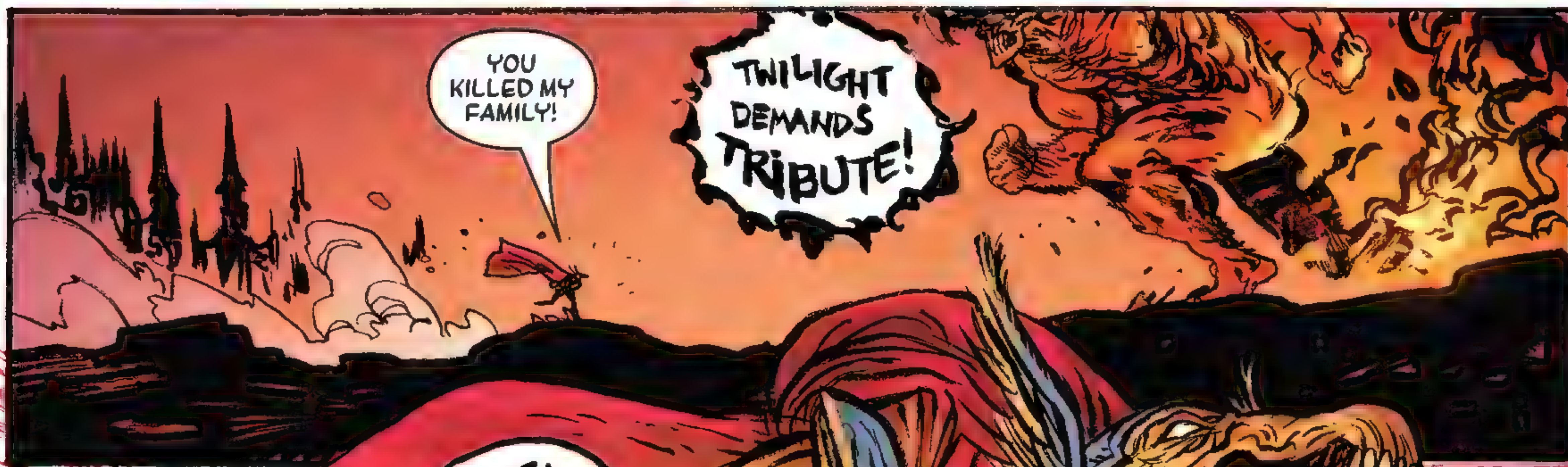
TWILIGHT
IS
WISE!



YOU
KILLED MY
PEOPLE!

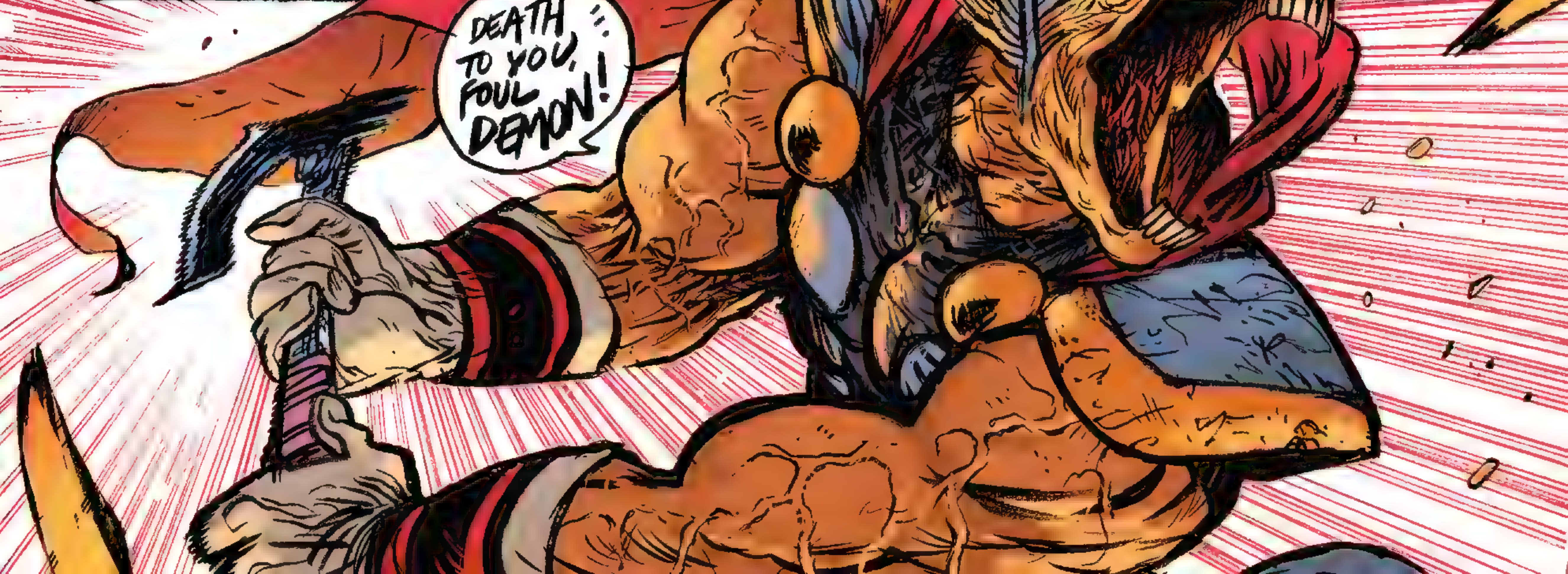


TWILIGHT IS
BEAUTIFUL!

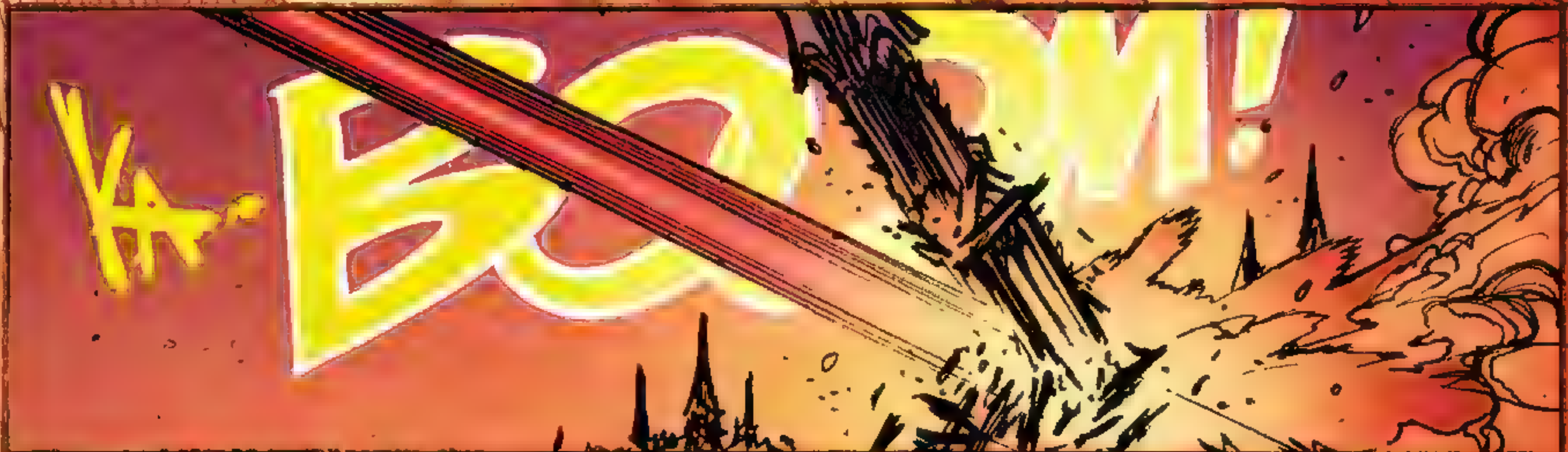
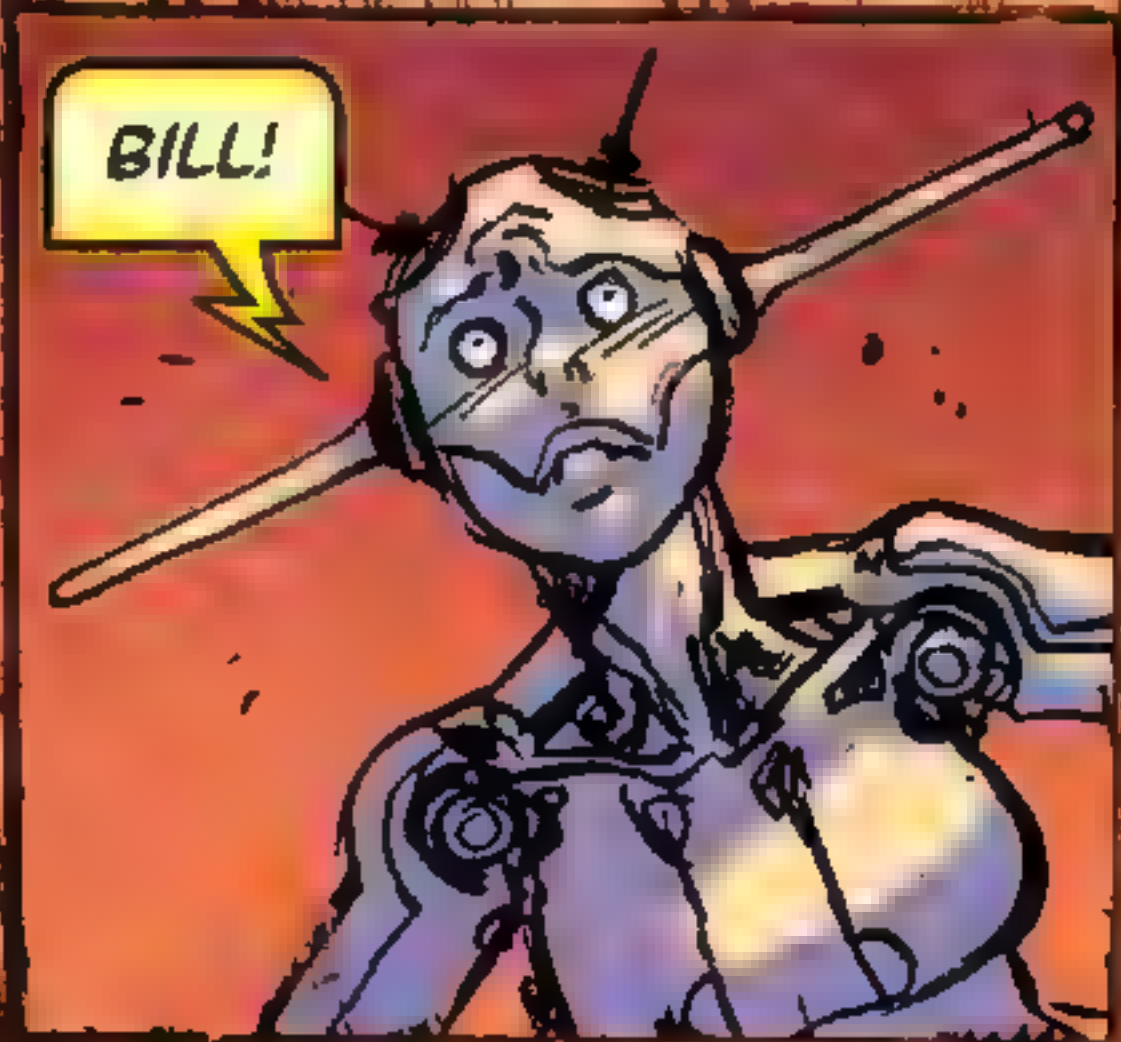


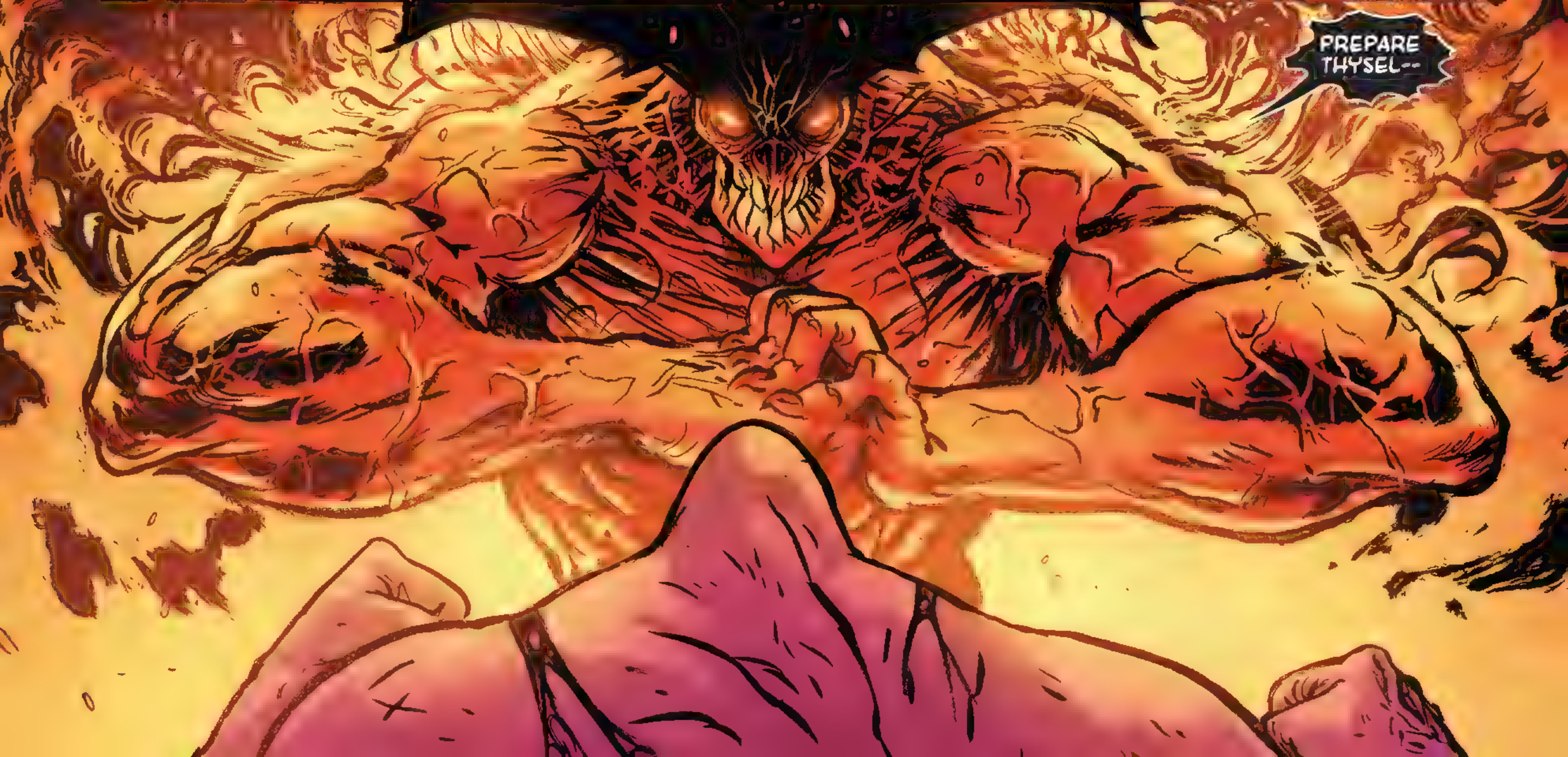
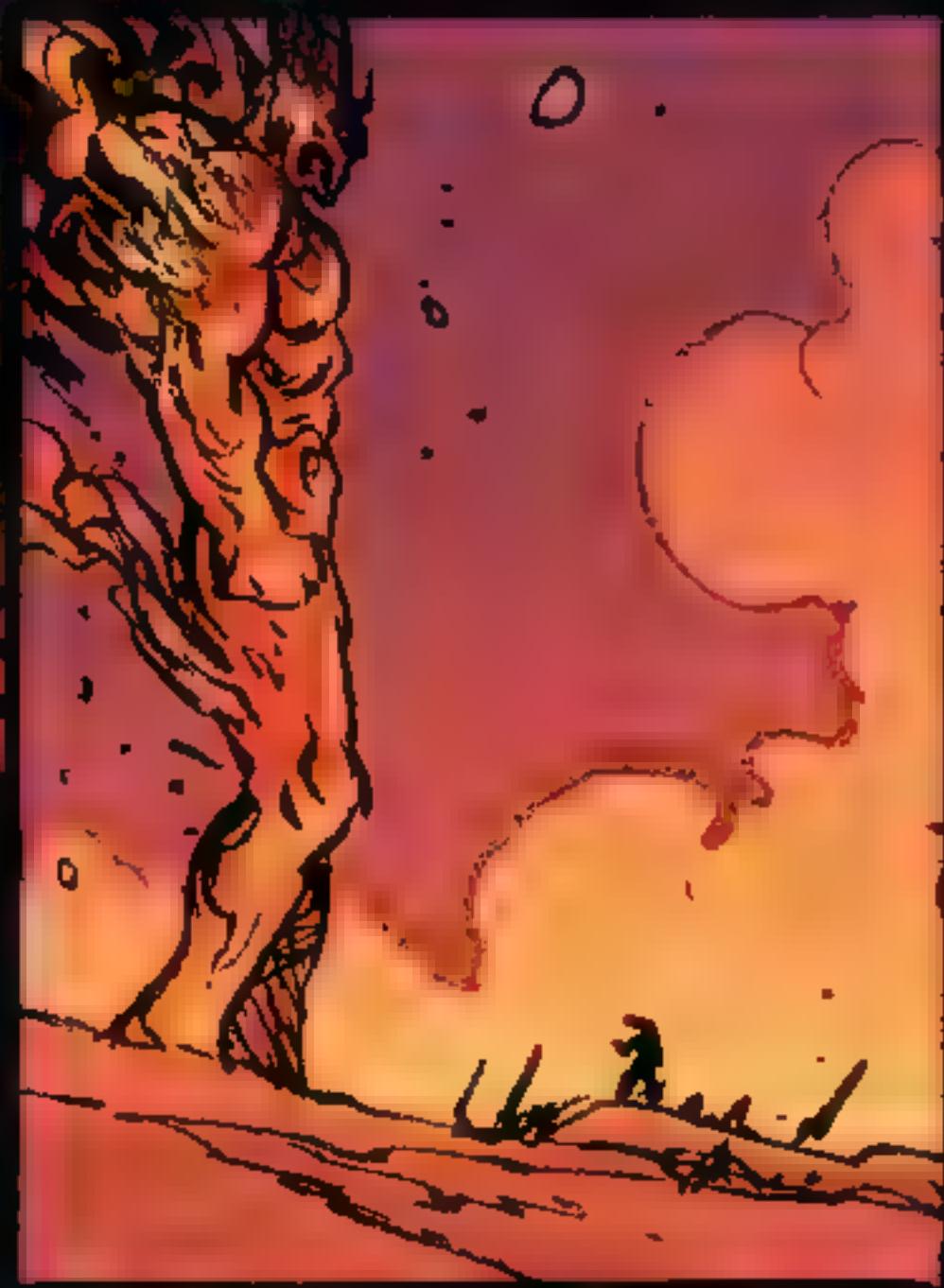
YOU
KILLED MY
FAMILY!

TWILIGHT
DEMANDS
TRIBUTE!



DEATH
TO YOU,
FOUL
DEMON!



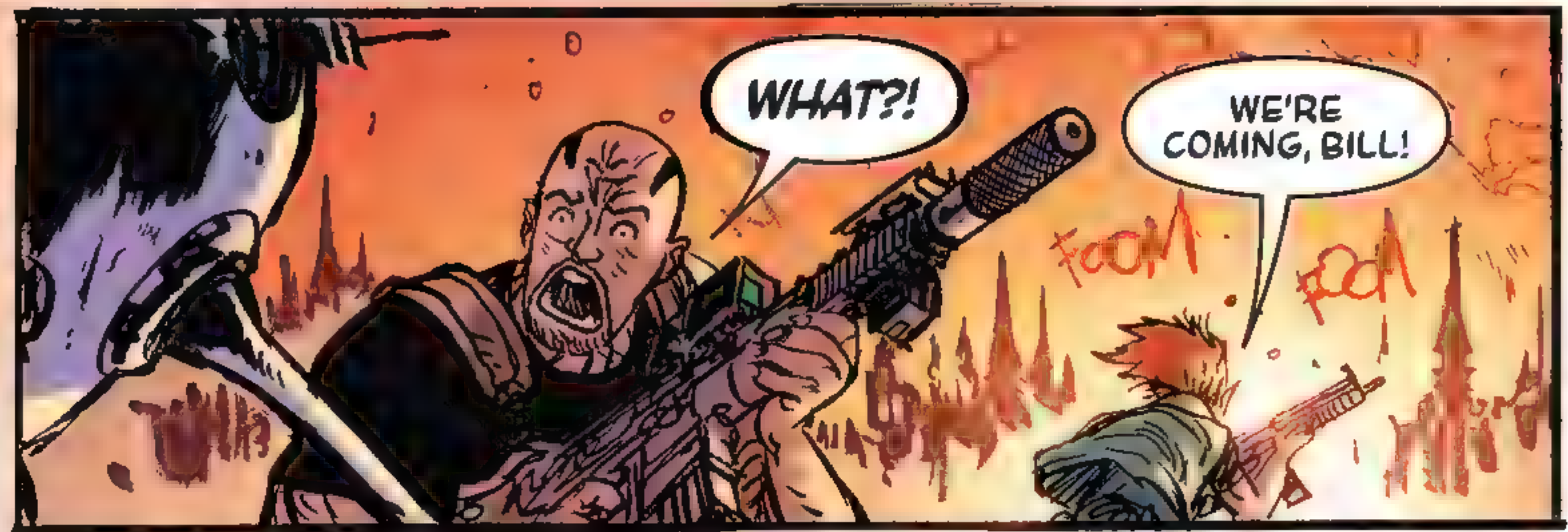




ROBO LADY!
PIP AND I HAVE
BEEN FREED FROM
THE TENTACLES
AND ARE HERE
TO FIGHT!

WHERE'S
BILL?!

IN THAT CITY!
HE IS FIGHTING
SURTUR.



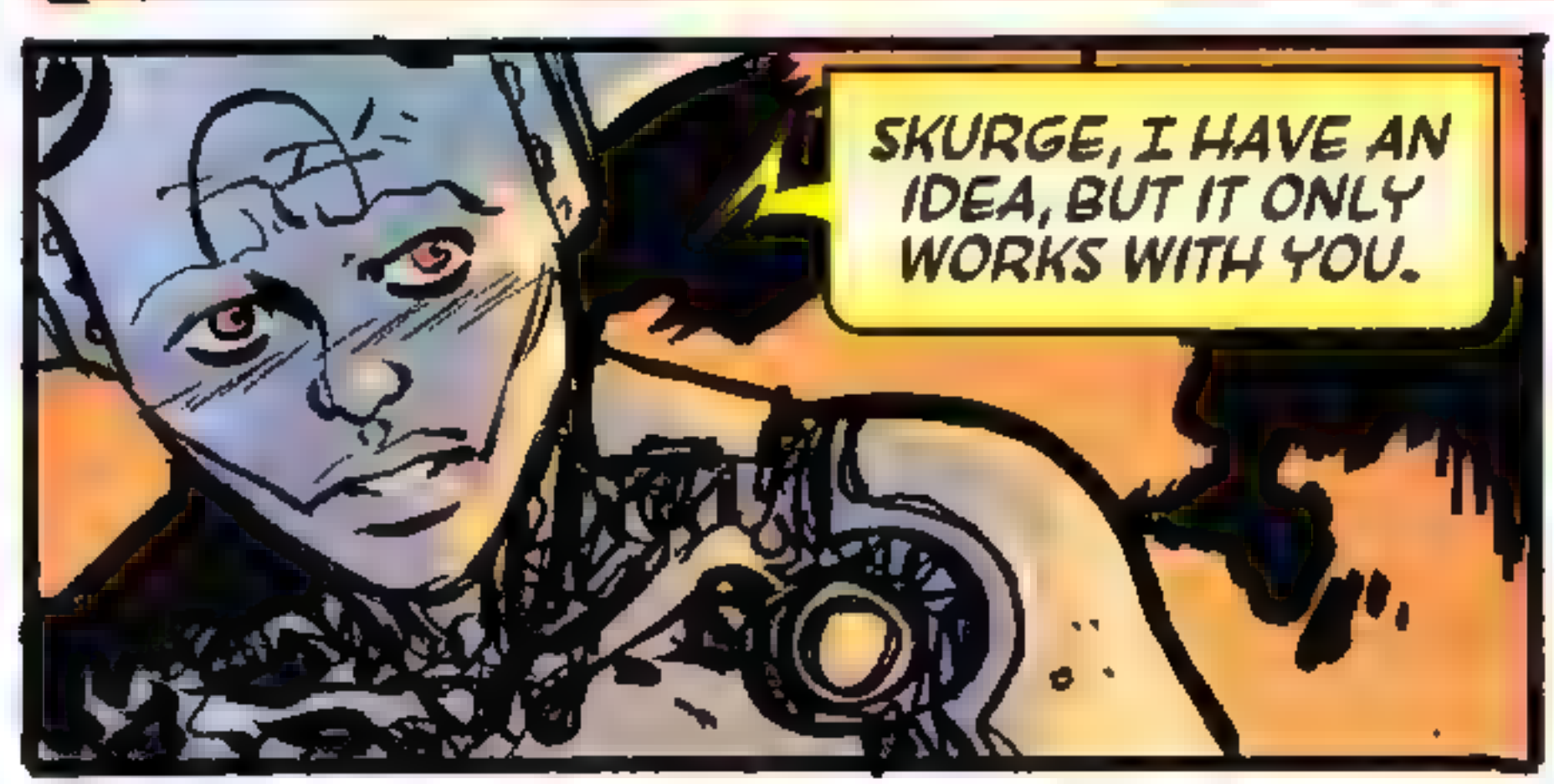
WHAT?!

WE'RE
COMING, BILL!



SKURGE,
WAIT! I NEED
YOUR HELP!

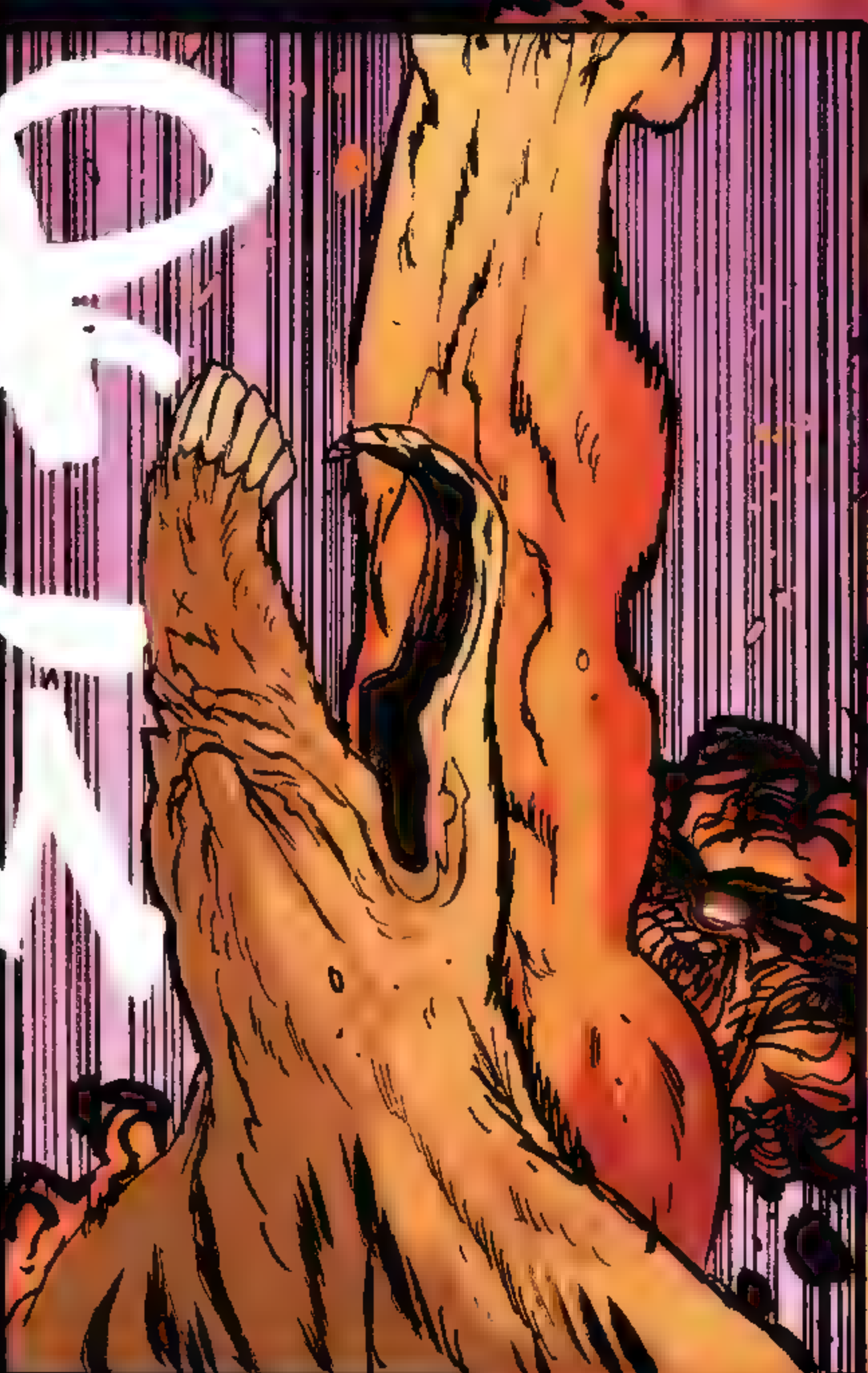
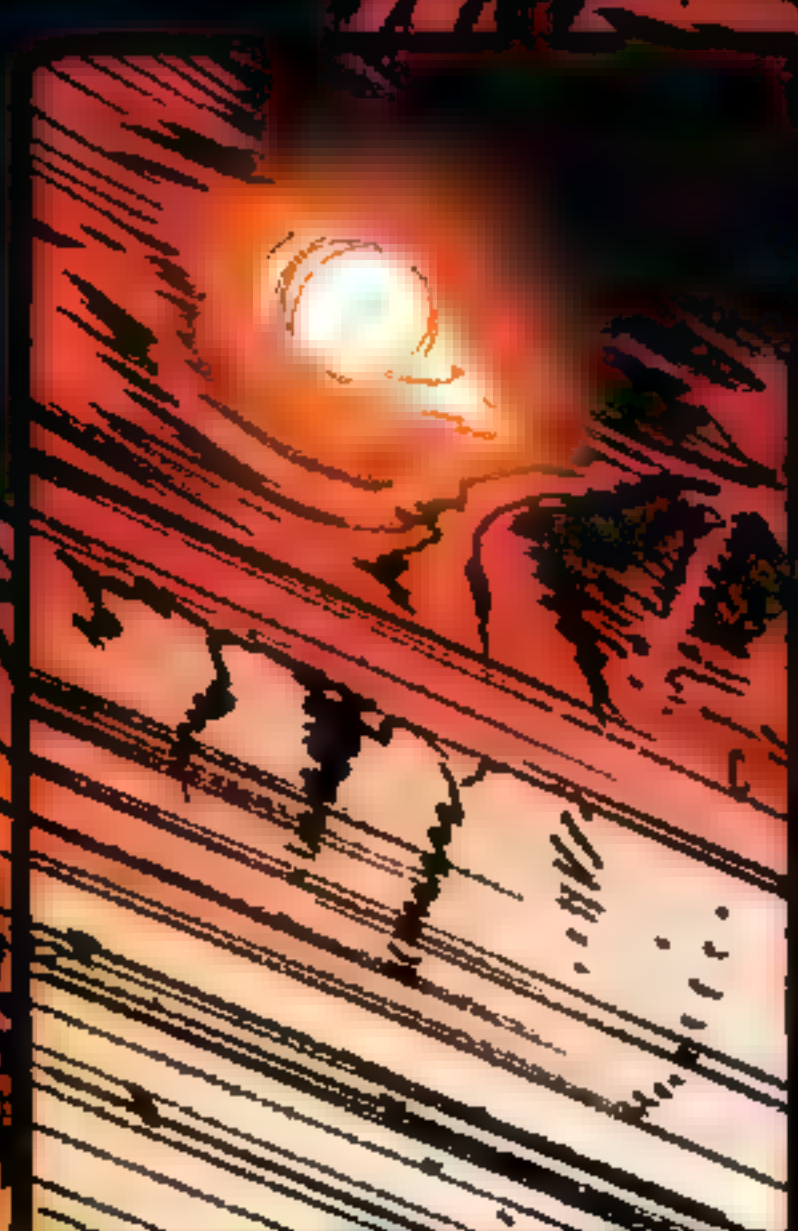
BUT--MY
WINGMAN IS IN
NEED! I MUST
GO TO HIM!



SKURGE, I HAVE AN
IDEA, BUT IT ONLY
WORKS WITH YOU.

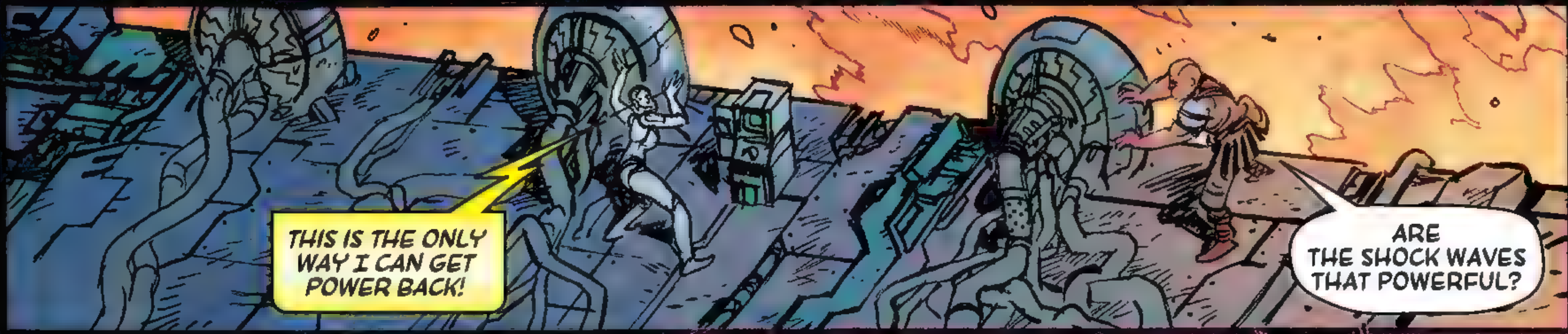


DO YOU
TRUST ME?



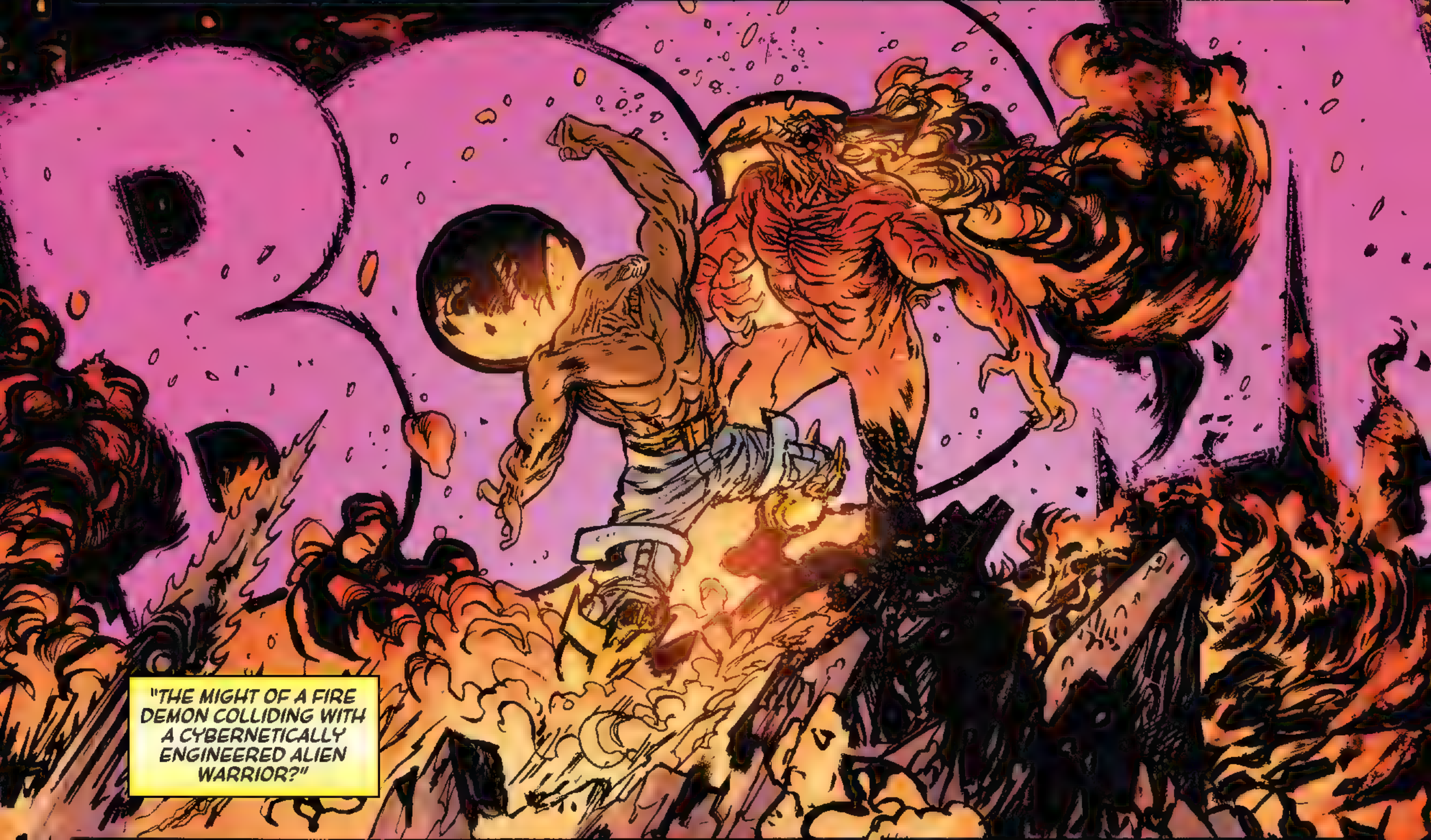


HURRY,
SKURGE!

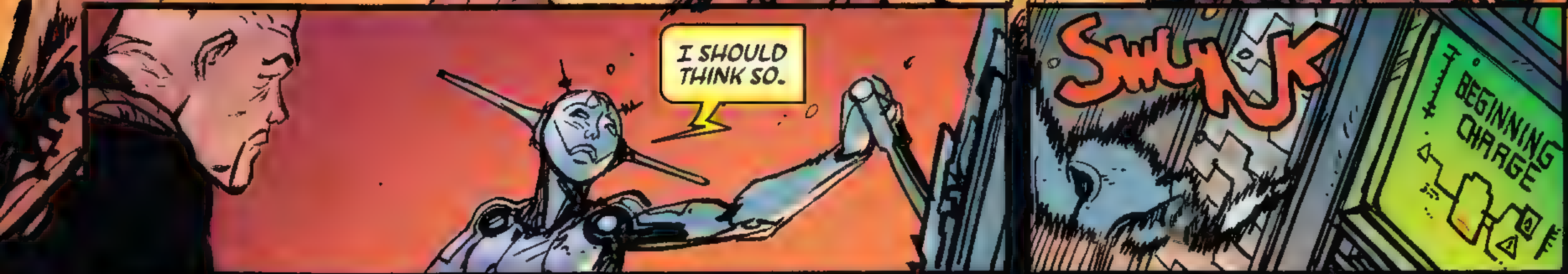


THIS IS THE ONLY
WAY I CAN GET
POWER BACK!

ARE
THE SHOCK WAVES
THAT POWERFUL?



"THE MIGHT OF A FIRE
DEMON COLLIDING WITH
A CYBERNETICALLY
ENGINEERED ALIEN
WARRIOR?"



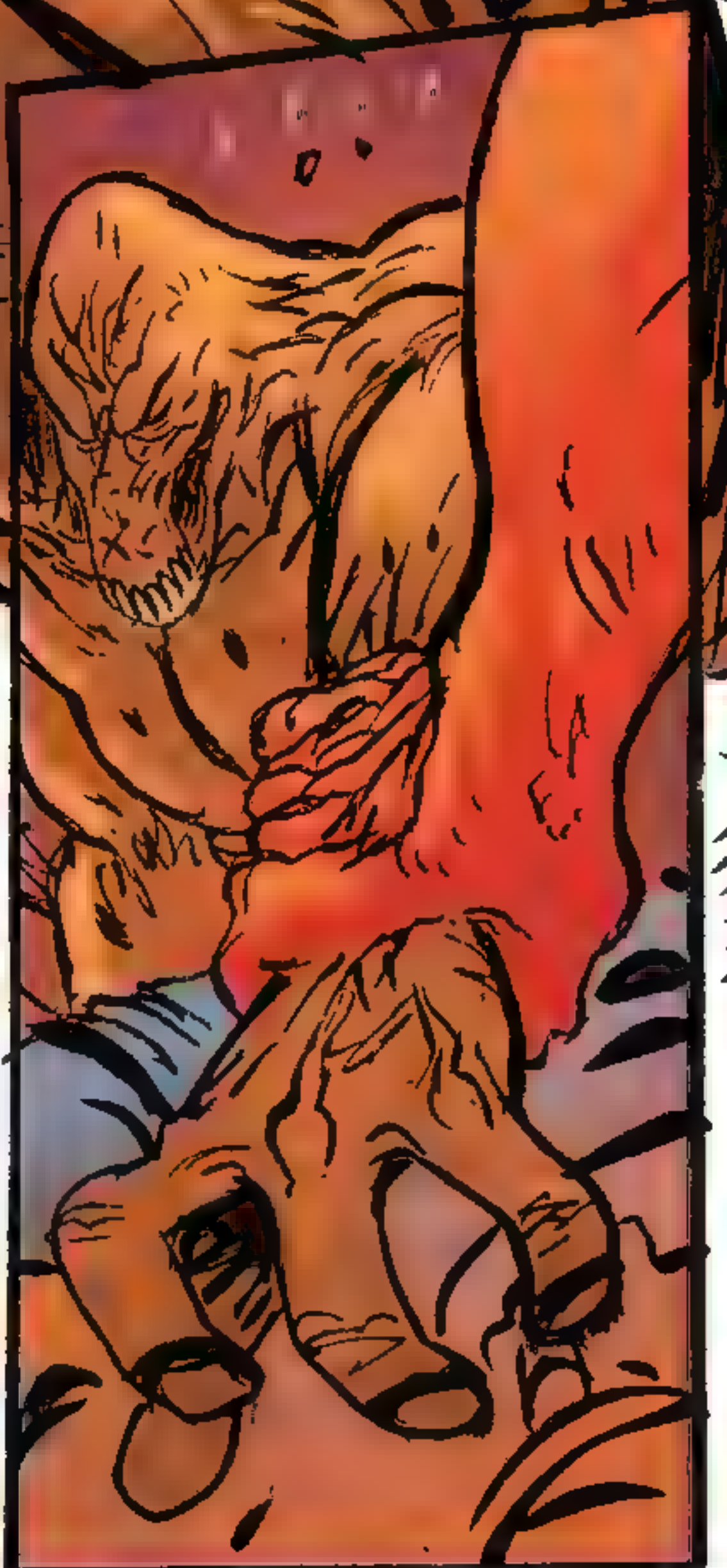
I SHOULD
THINK SO.

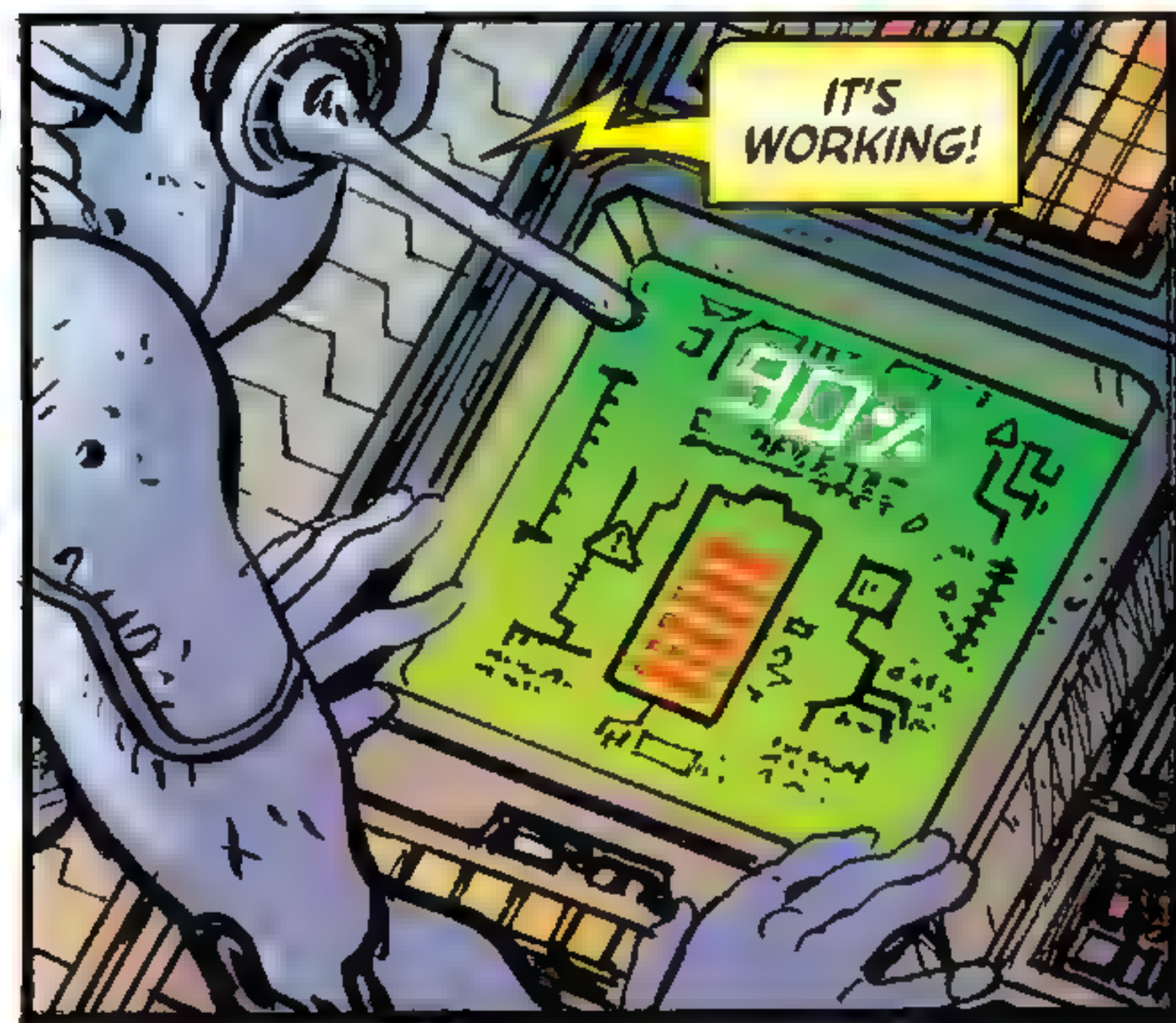
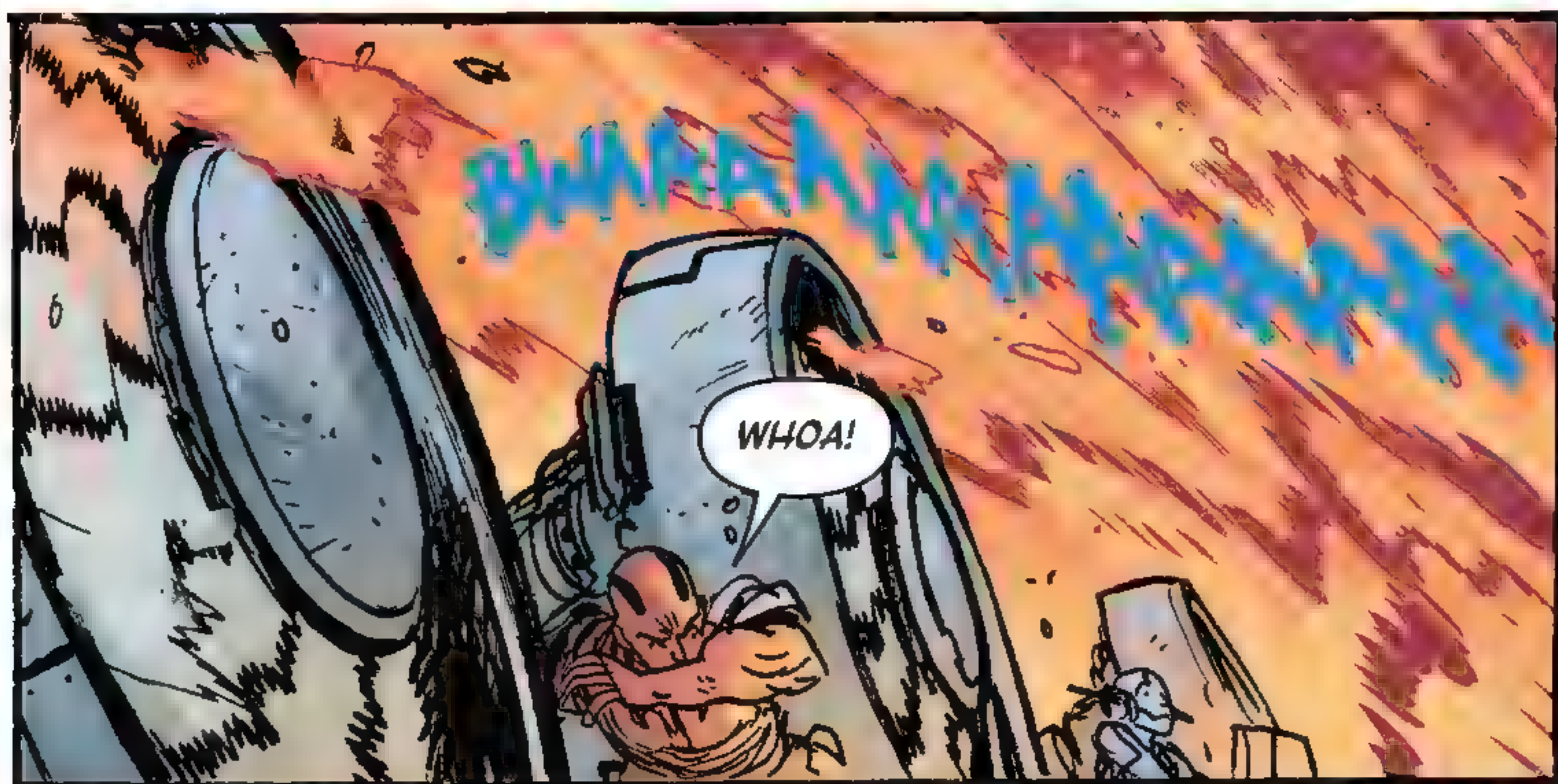
SMACK

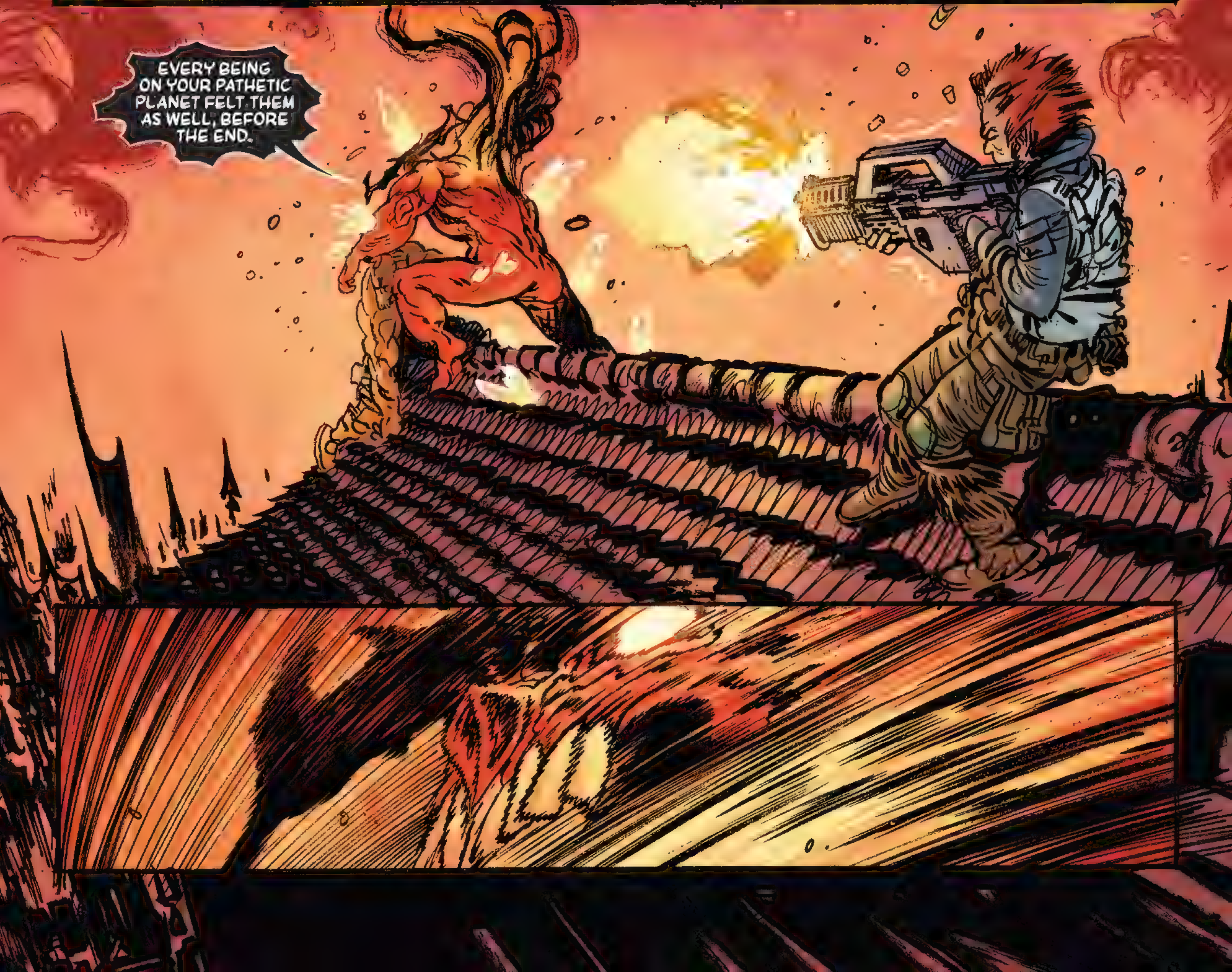
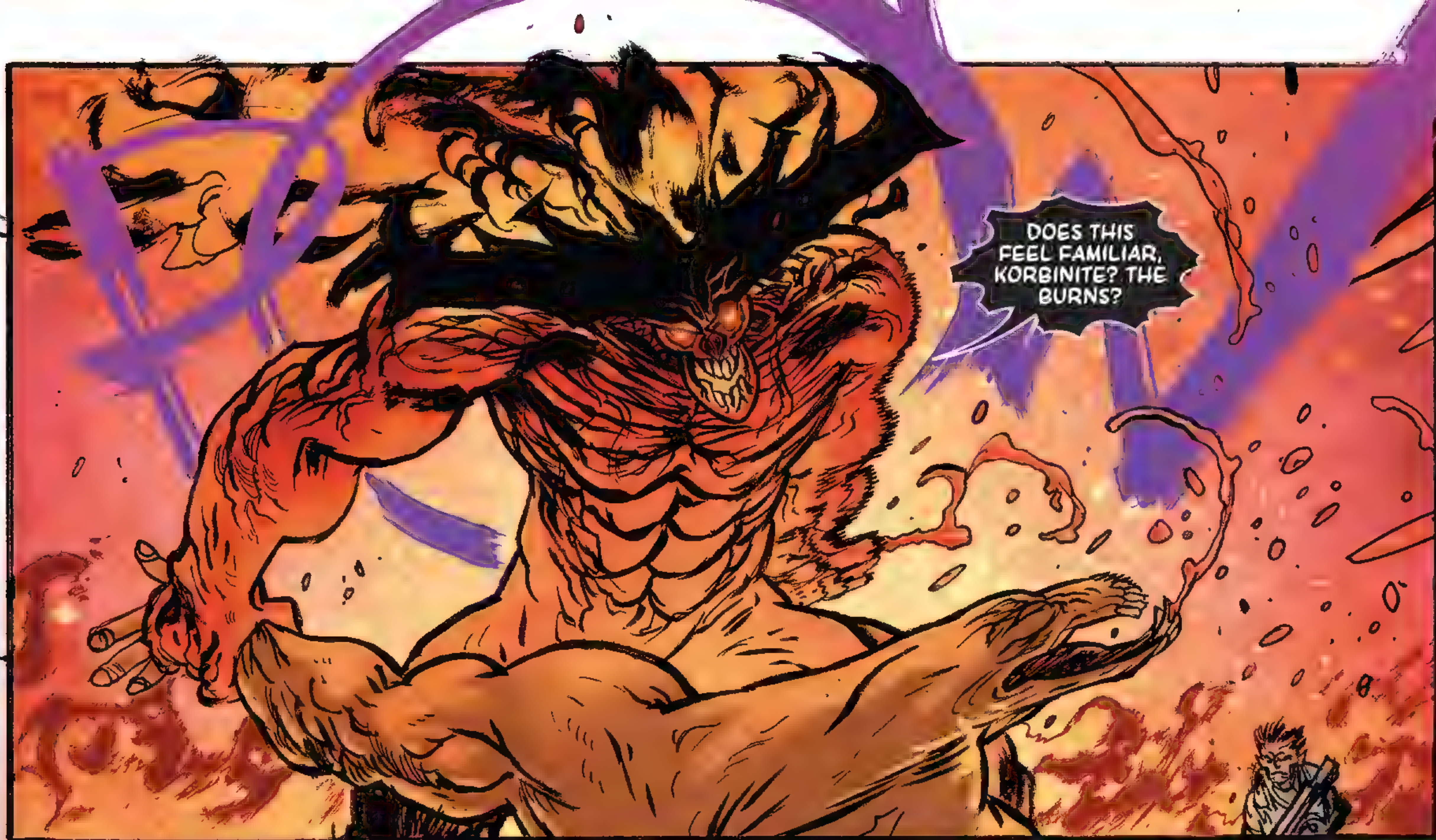
BEGINNING
CHARGE



GIVE
HIM HELL,
BILL.



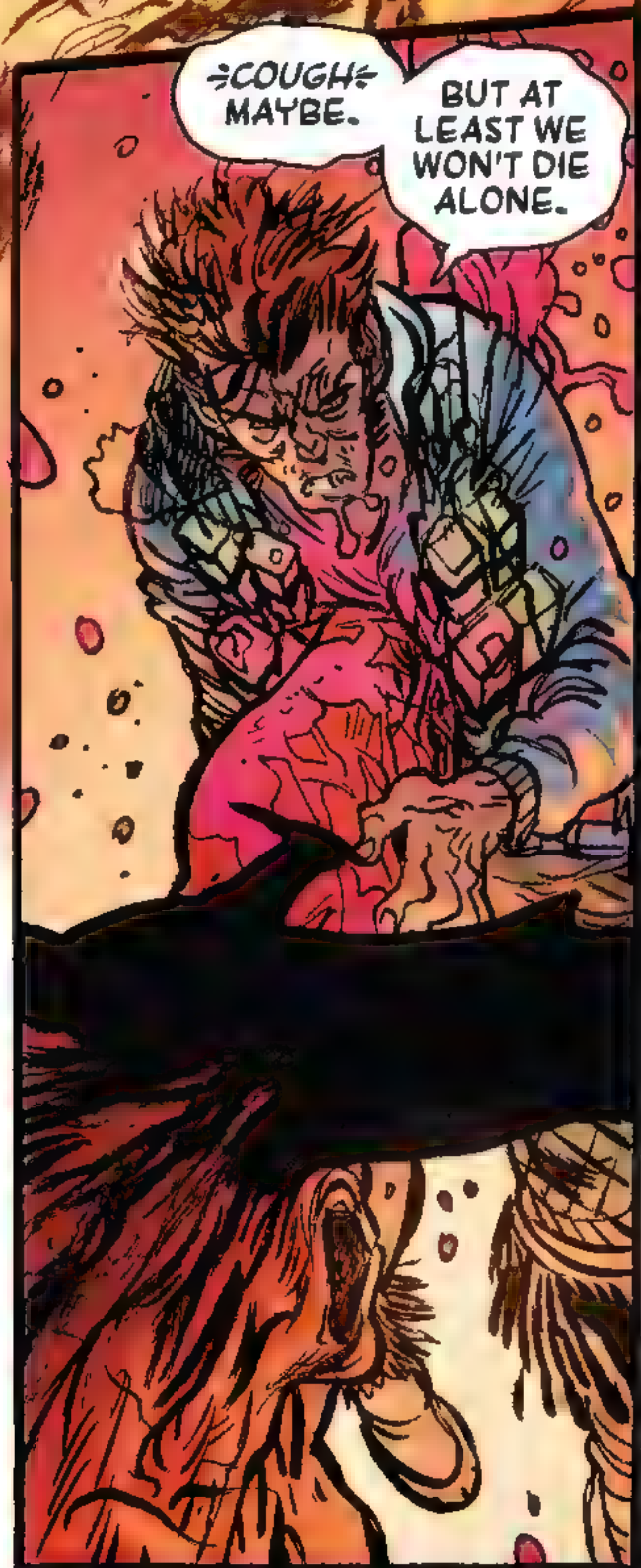






AND NOW
THE END IS
HERE FOR ALL
OF YOU.

PIP--
NO--!



COUGH
MAYBE.

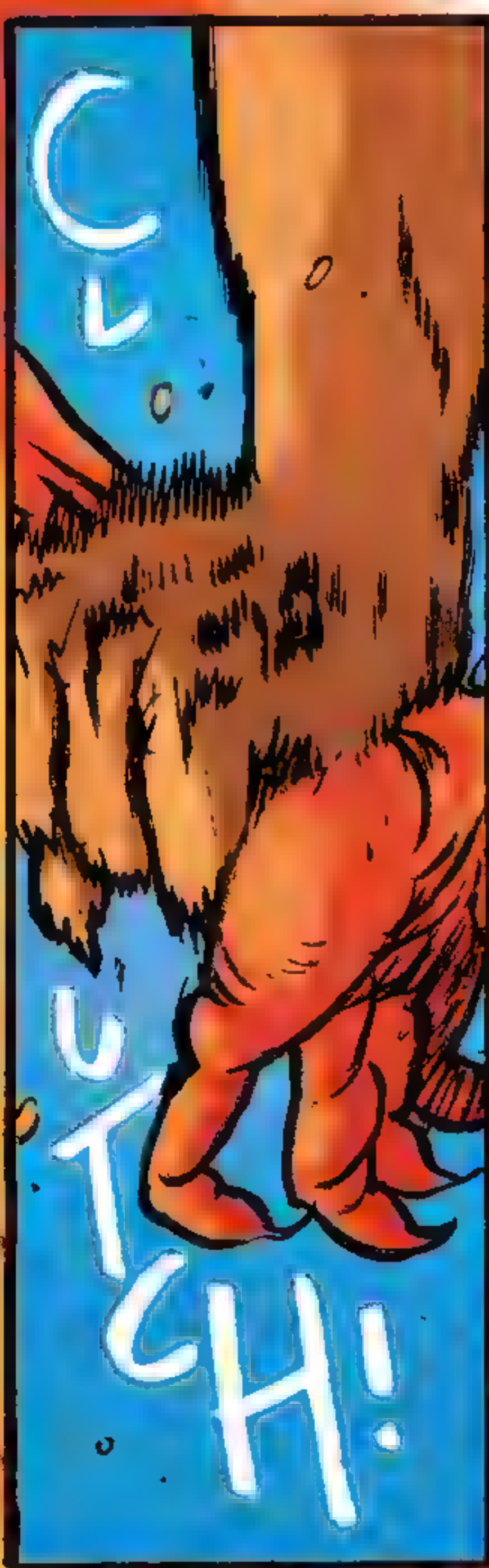
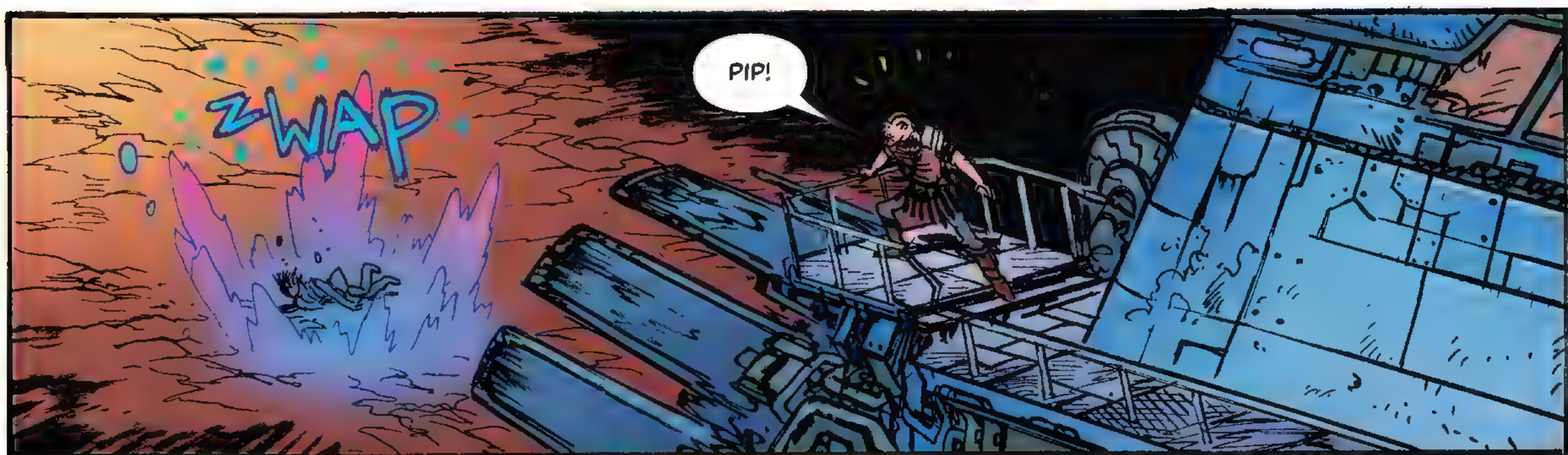
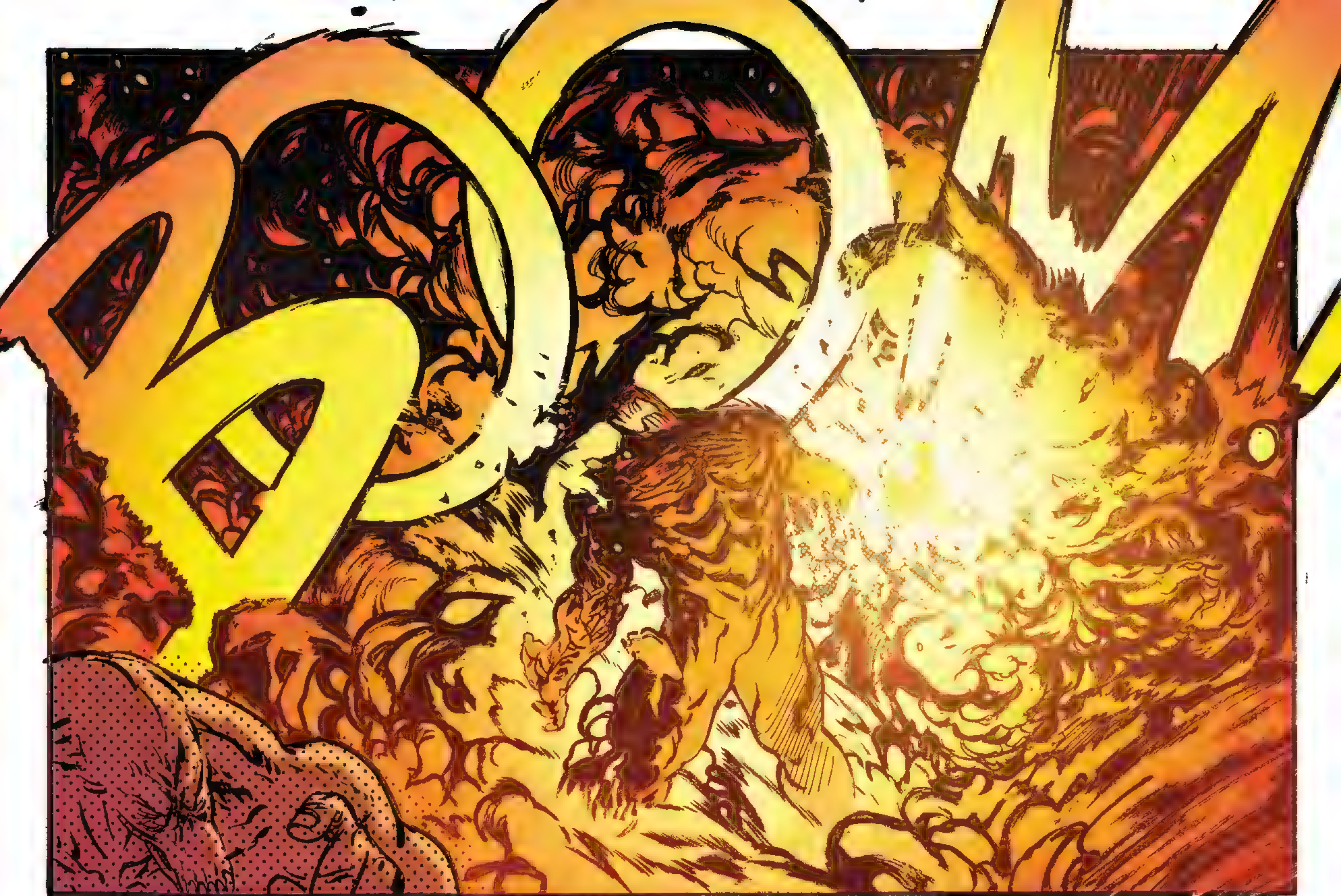
BUT AT
LEAST WE
WON'T DIE
ALONE.



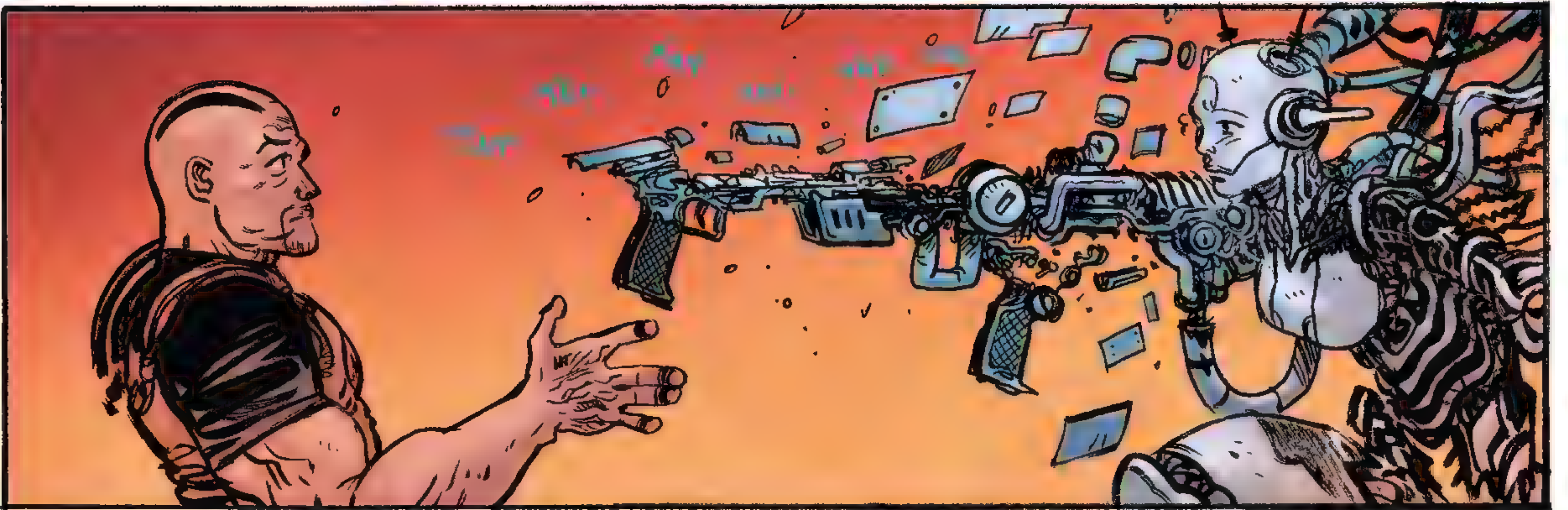
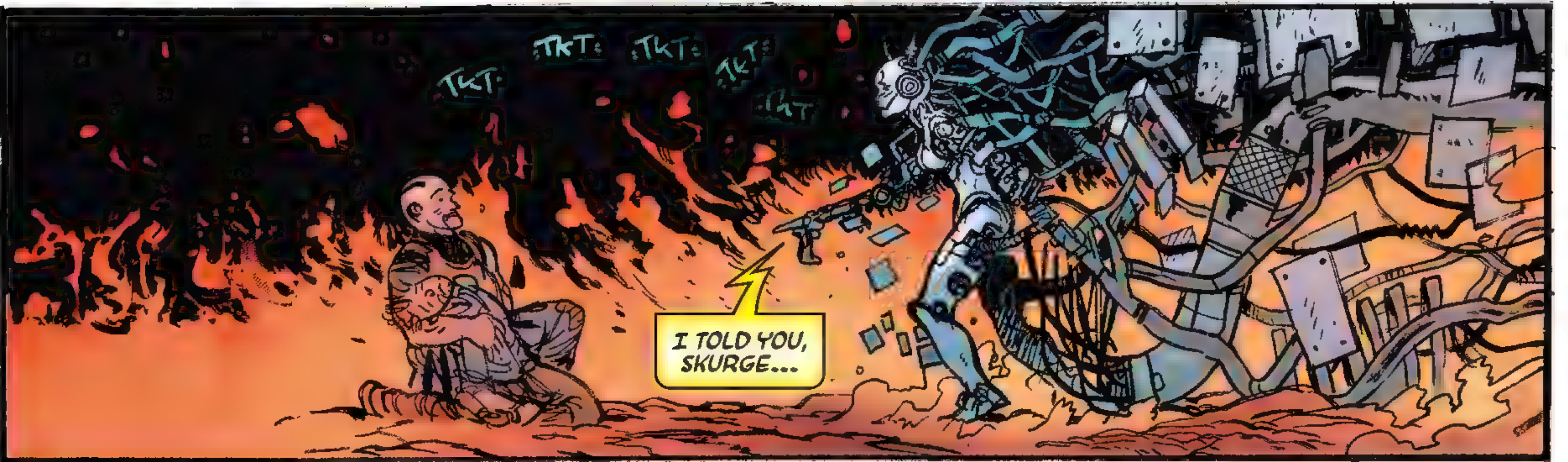
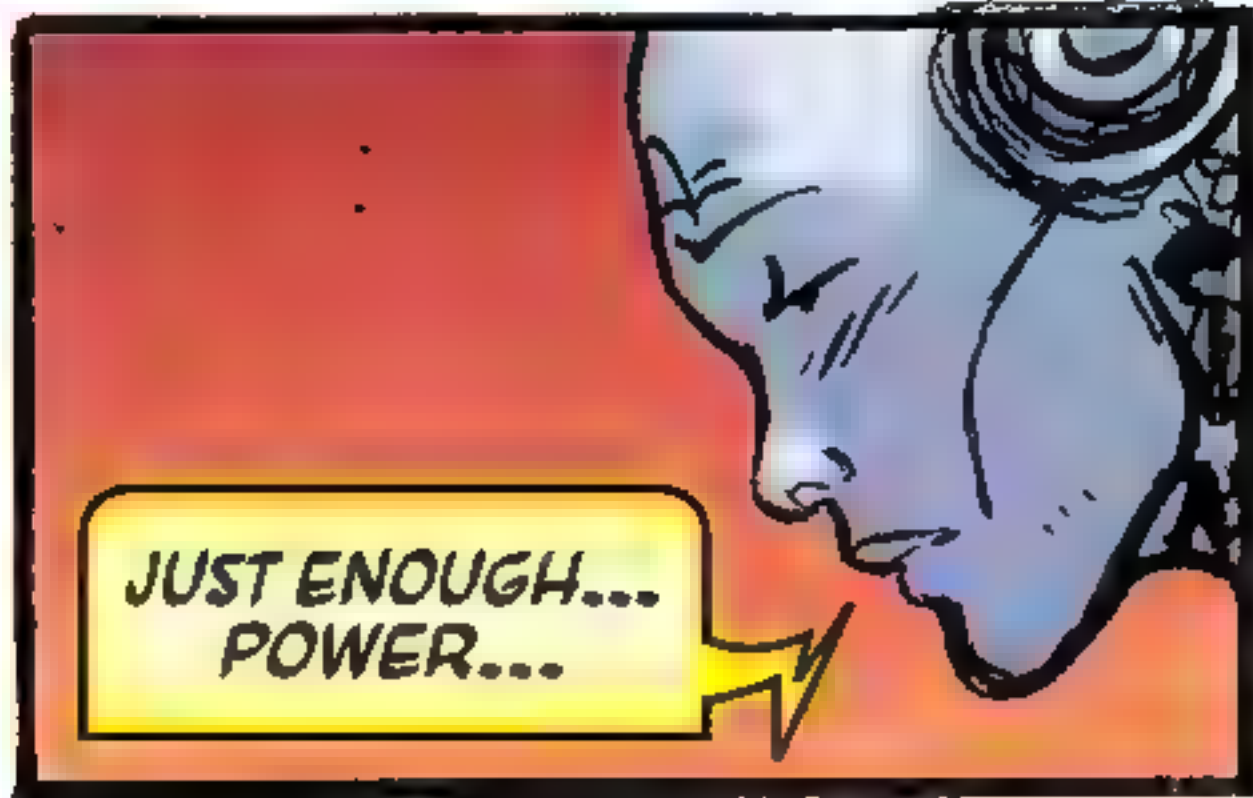
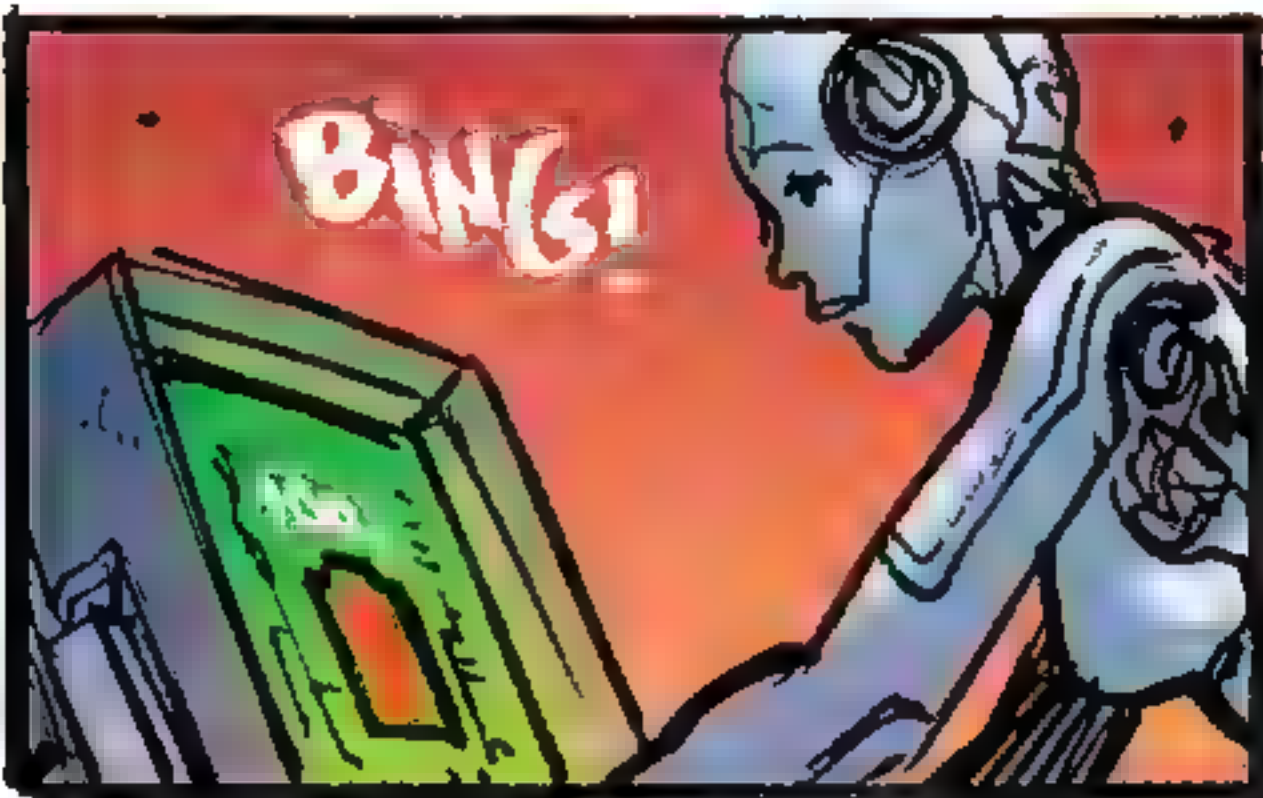
UNLIKE
YOU.



FEEL
IT!



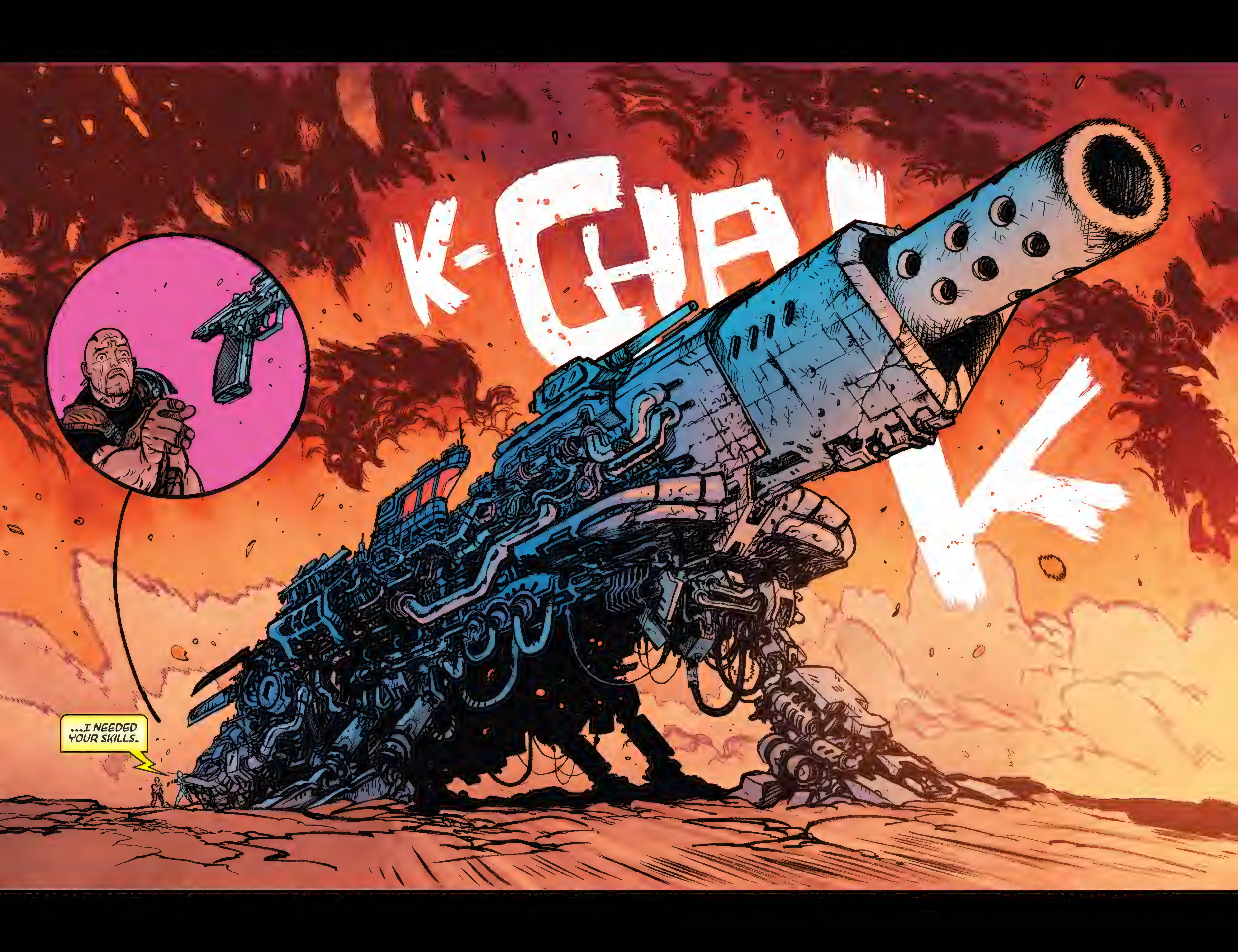


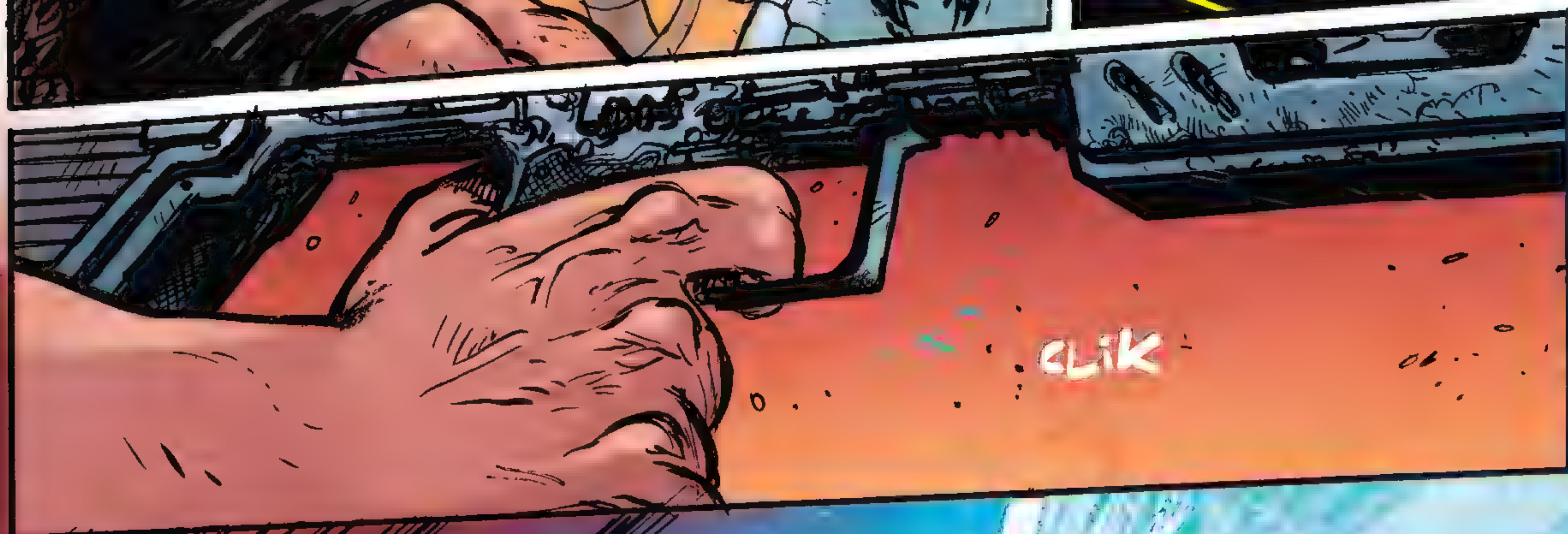
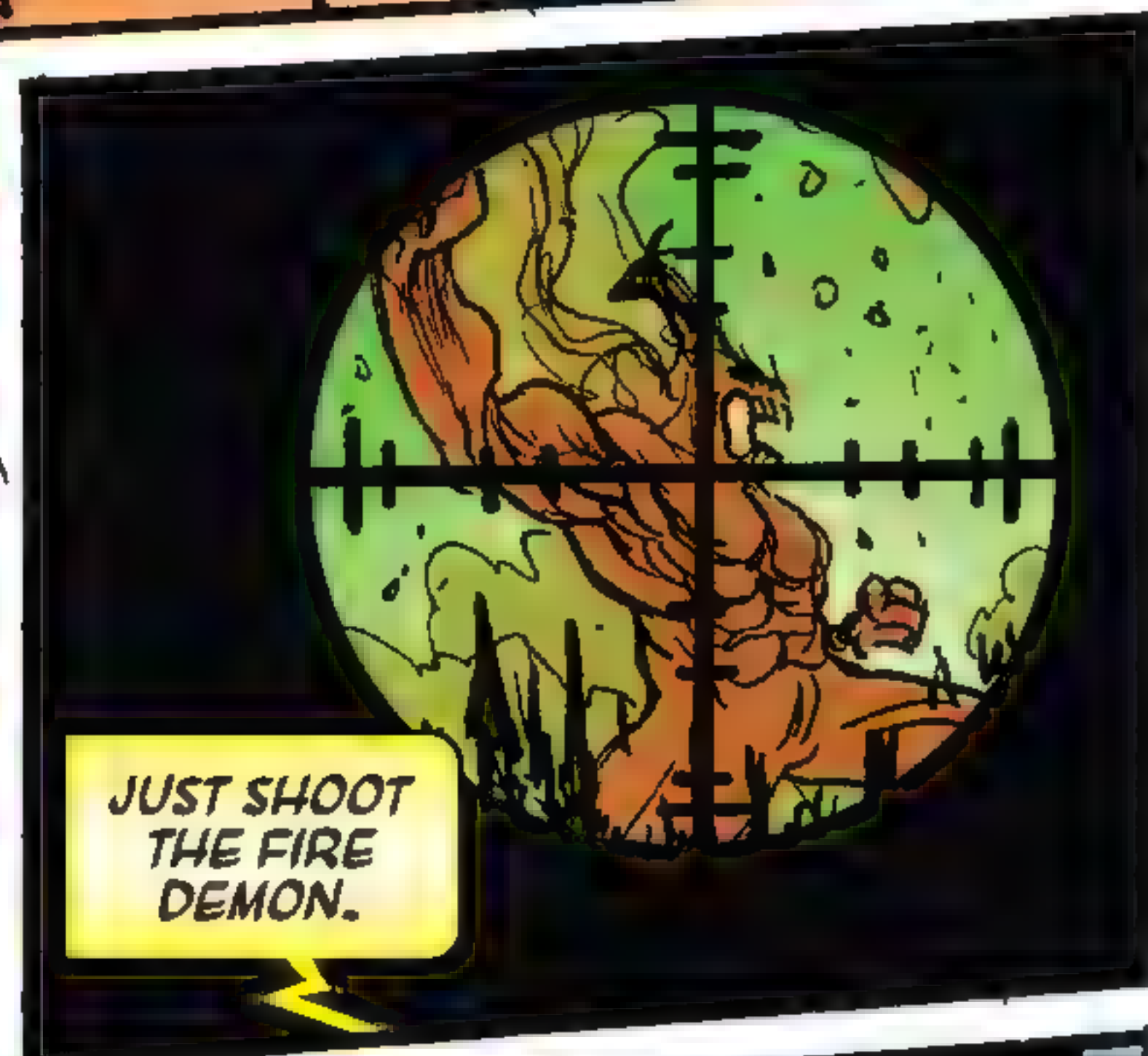
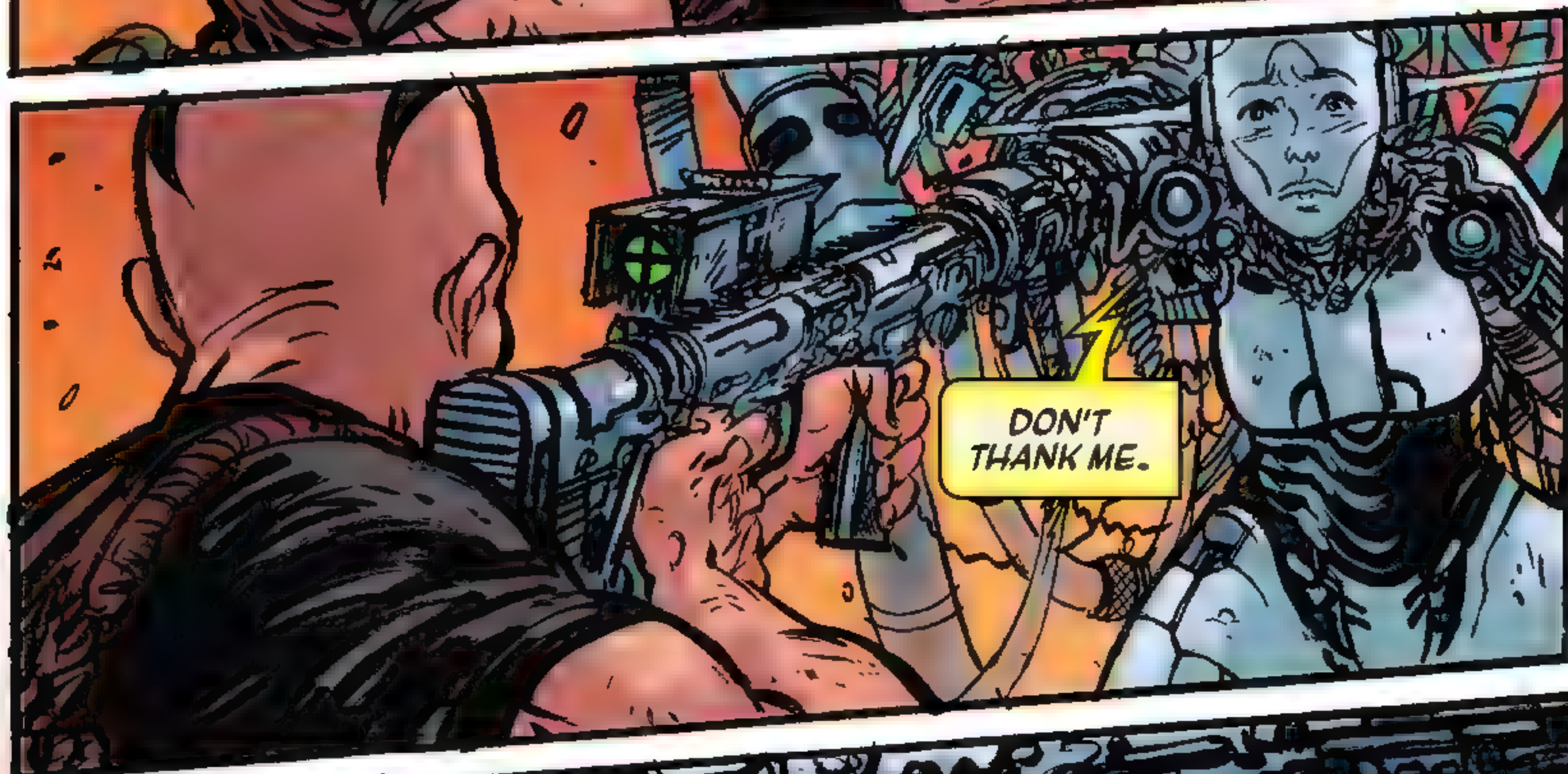
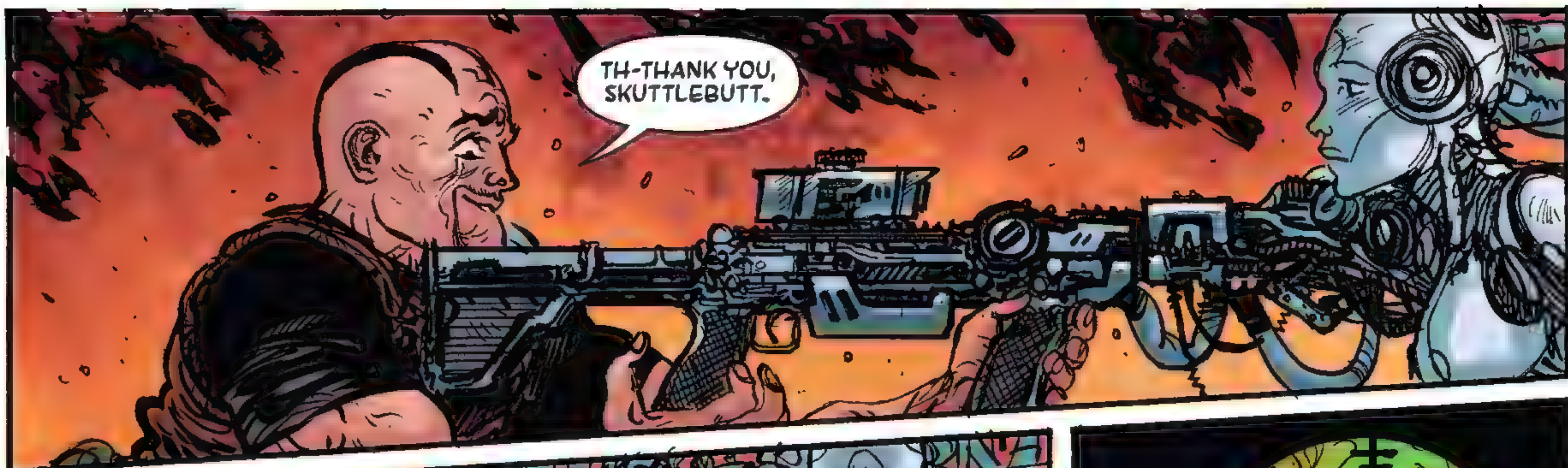


KOCHA!

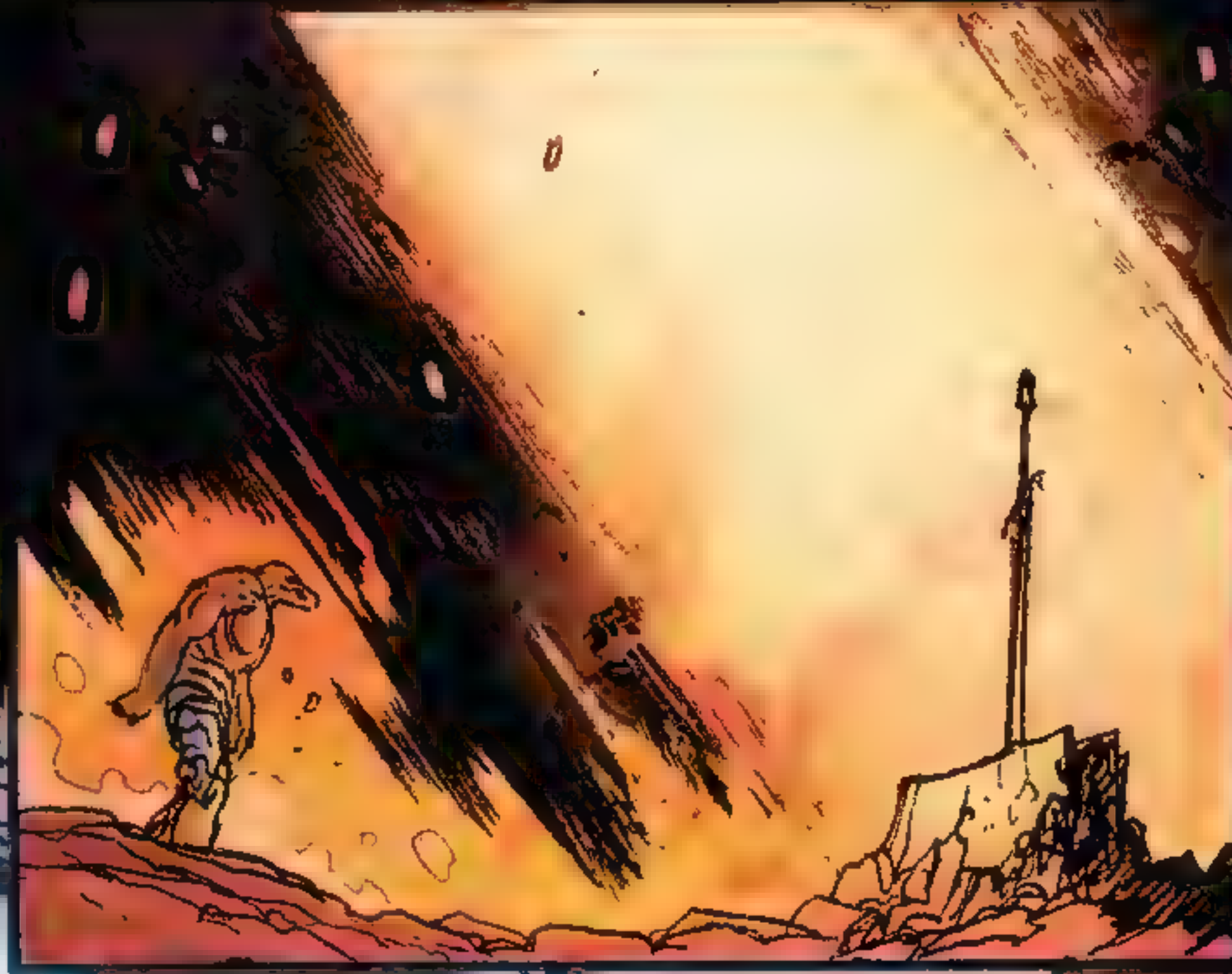
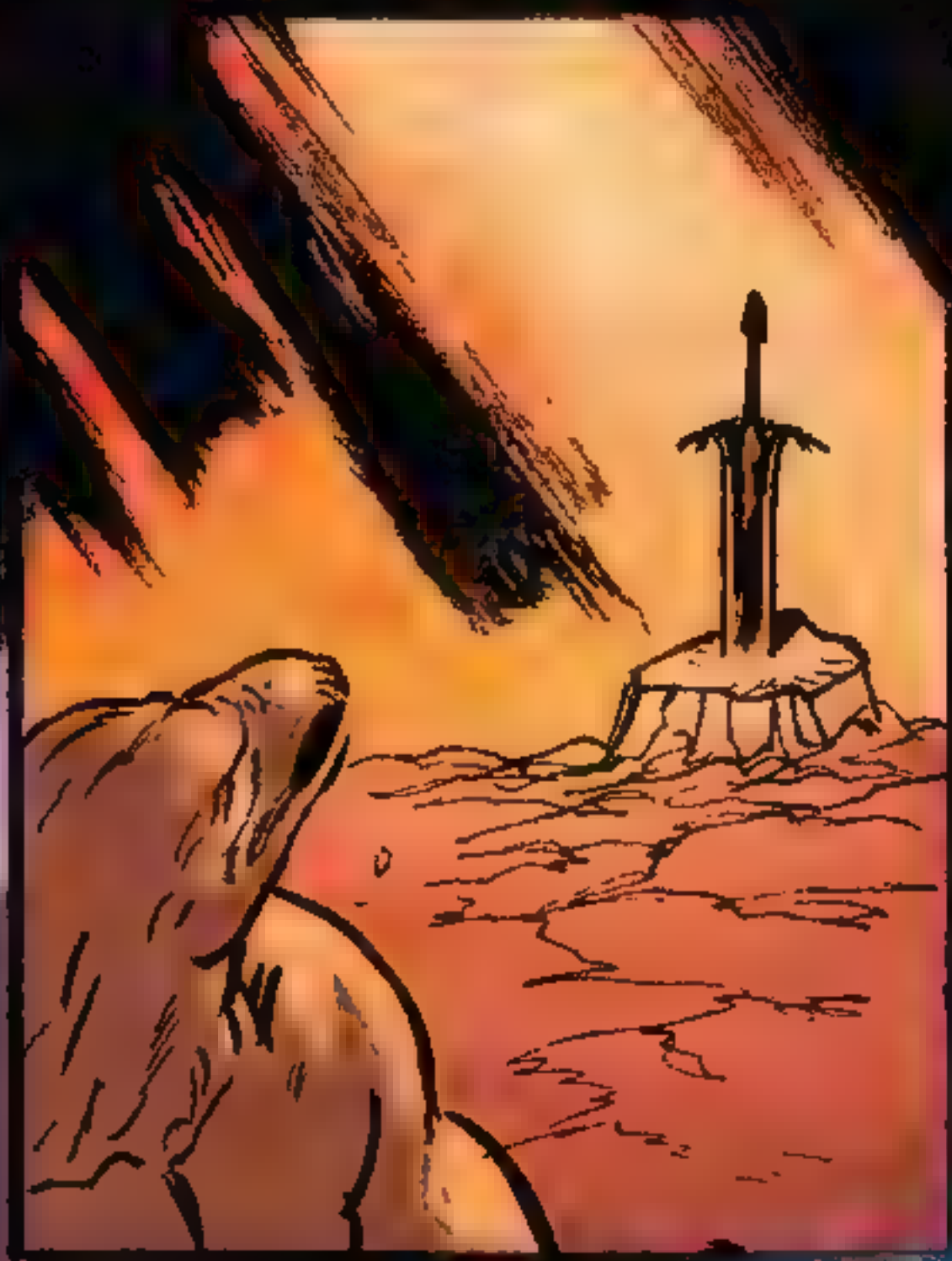
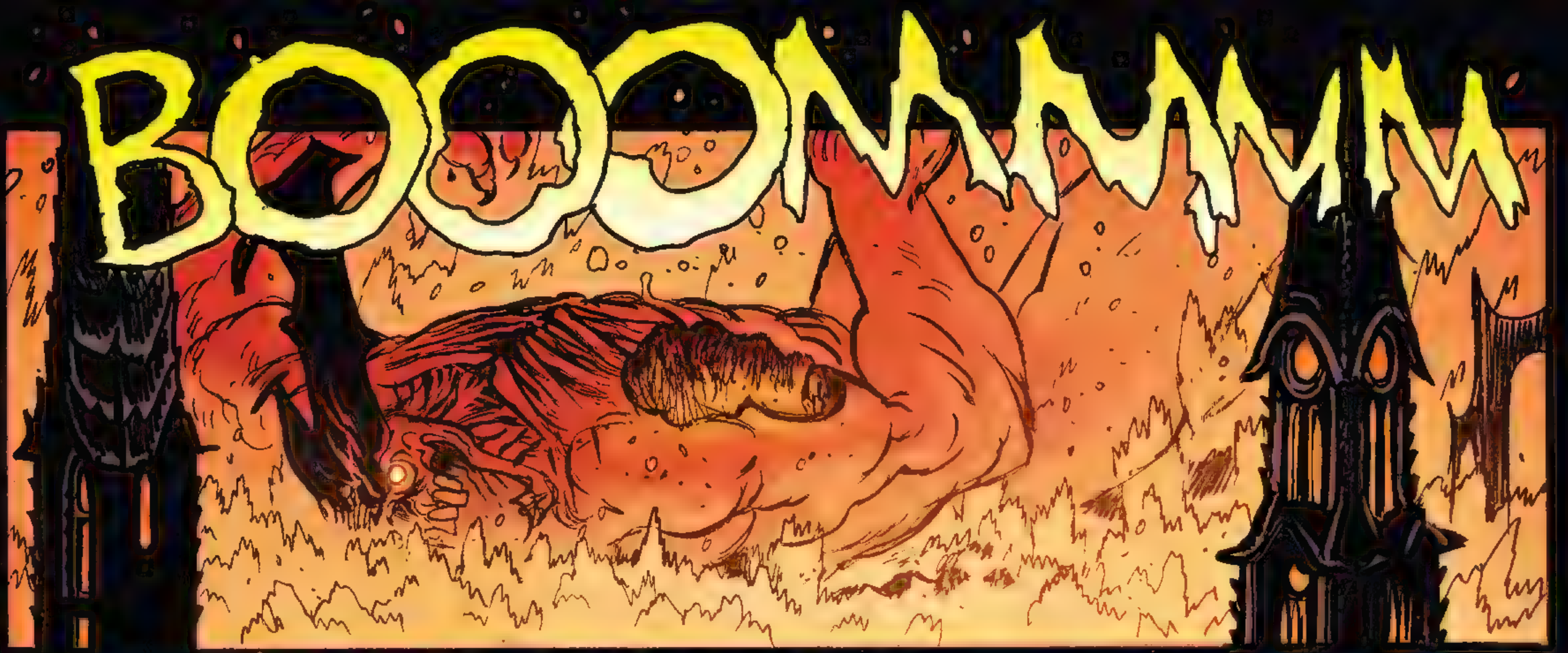


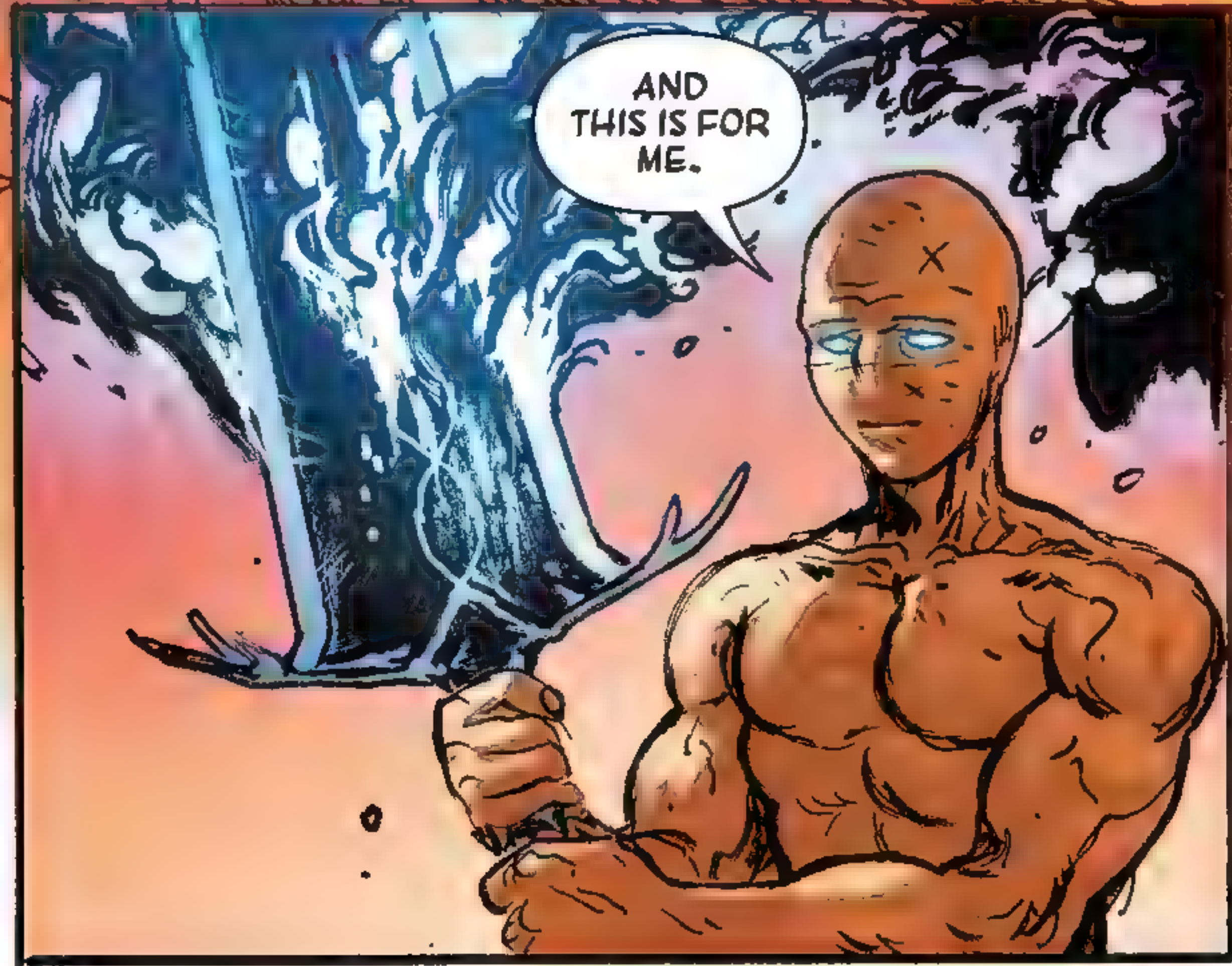
...I NEEDED
YOUR SKILLS.

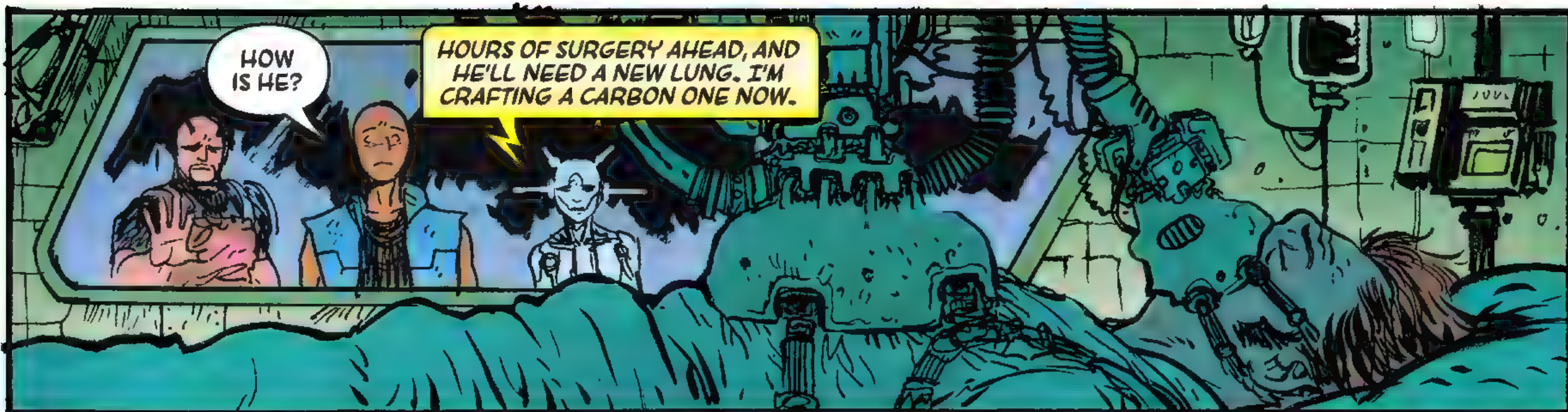












HOW IS HE?

HOURS OF SURGERY AHEAD, AND HE'LL NEED A NEW LUNG. I'M CRAFTING A CARBON ONE NOW.



I THINK HE'S GOING TO MAKE IT.

NOT SURPRISED. THAT TROLL IS MADE OF SOME THICK HIDE.

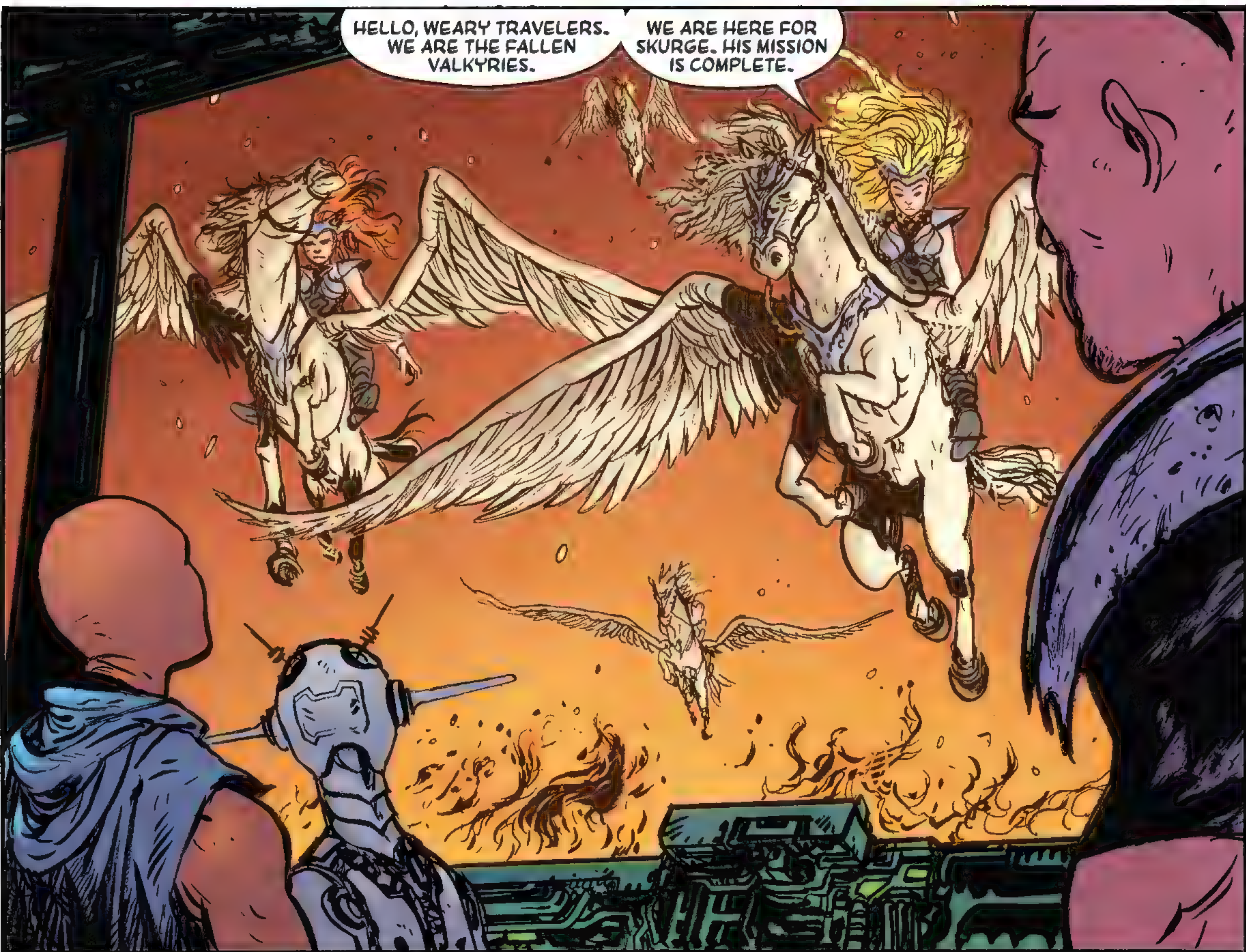


I WAS NEVER WORRIED.



ALL MY REMAINING POWER IS GOING TO HIS RECOVERY. I'M NOT SURE HOW WE'RE GOING TO GET OUT OF--HOLD ON.

EXTERIOR SENSORS PICKING UP NEW LIFE-FORMS.



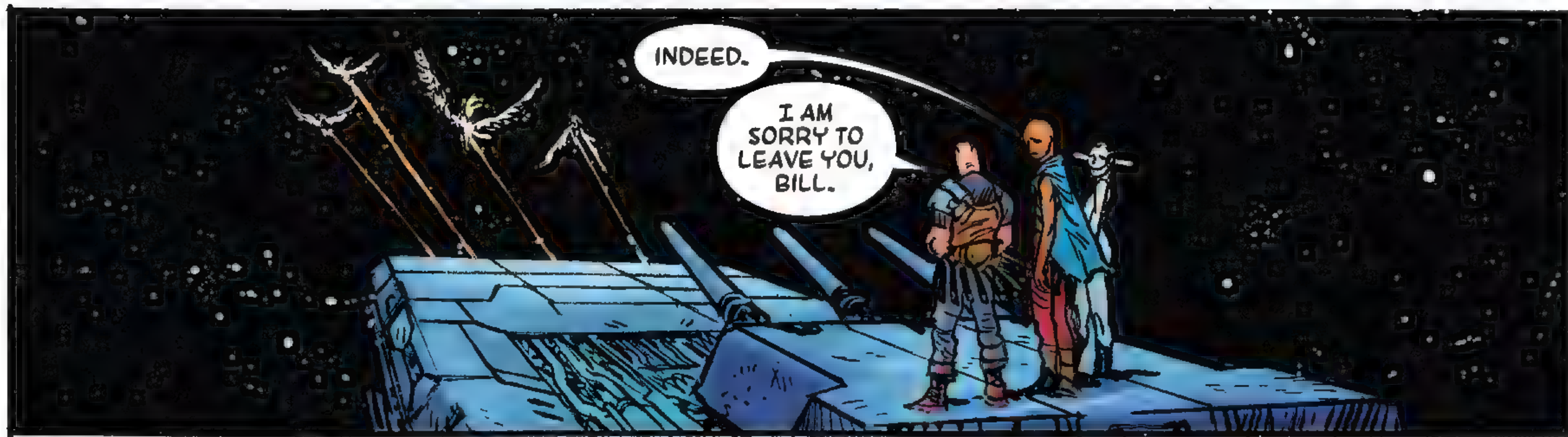
HELLO, WEARY TRAVELERS. WE ARE THE FALLEN VALKYRIES.

WE ARE HERE FOR SKURGE. HIS MISSION IS COMPLETE.



"IT IS TIME FOR HIM TO RETURN TO VALHALLA."

AH! IT FEELS GOOD TO BE OUT OF SUCH A TERRIBLE PLACE!



INDEED.

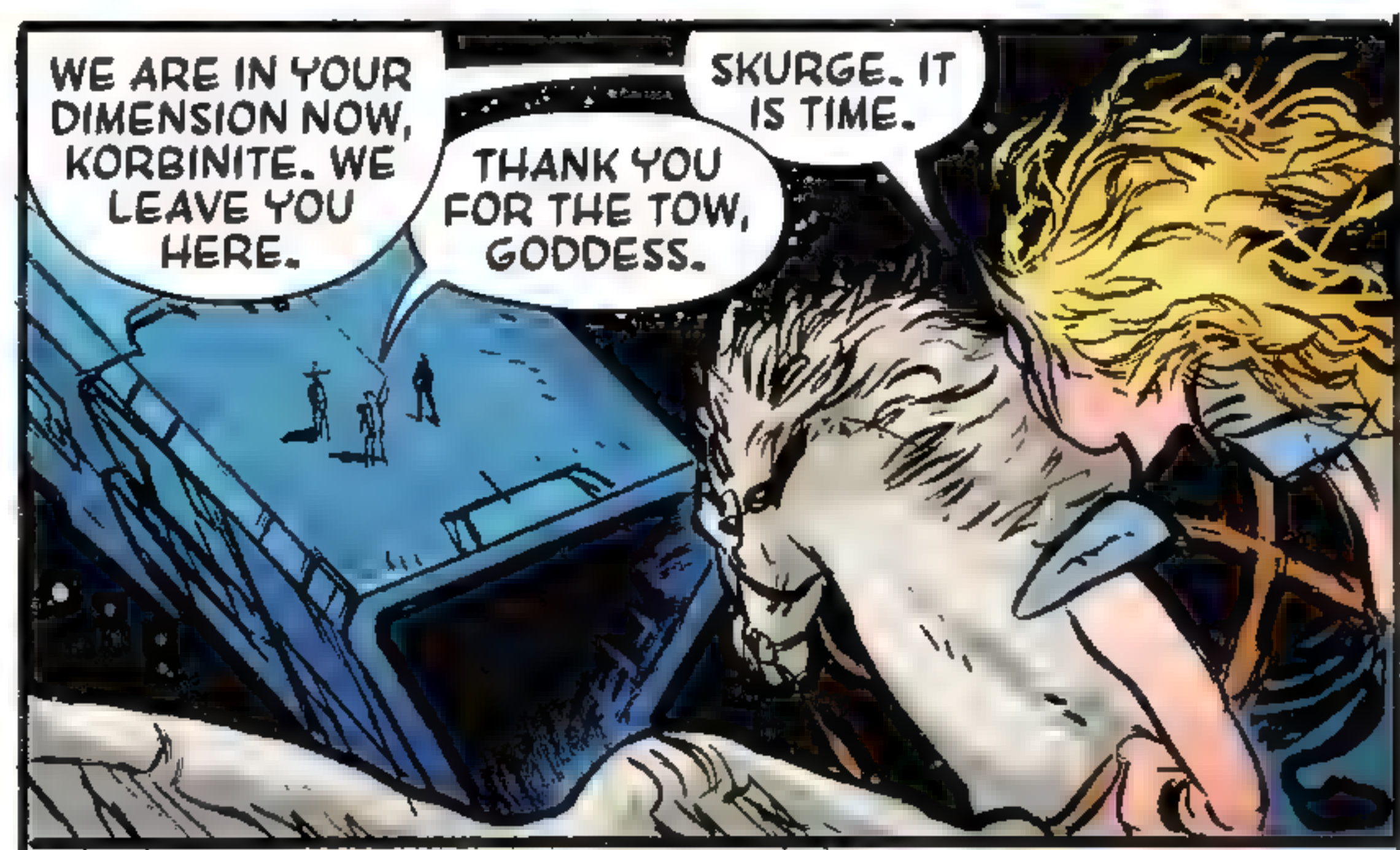
I AM SORRY TO LEAVE YOU, BILL.



SKURGE...I THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP. YOU'VE BEEN AN INCREDIBLE COMPANION ON MY TRAVELS.

AND WINGMAN! DON'T FORGET THAT!

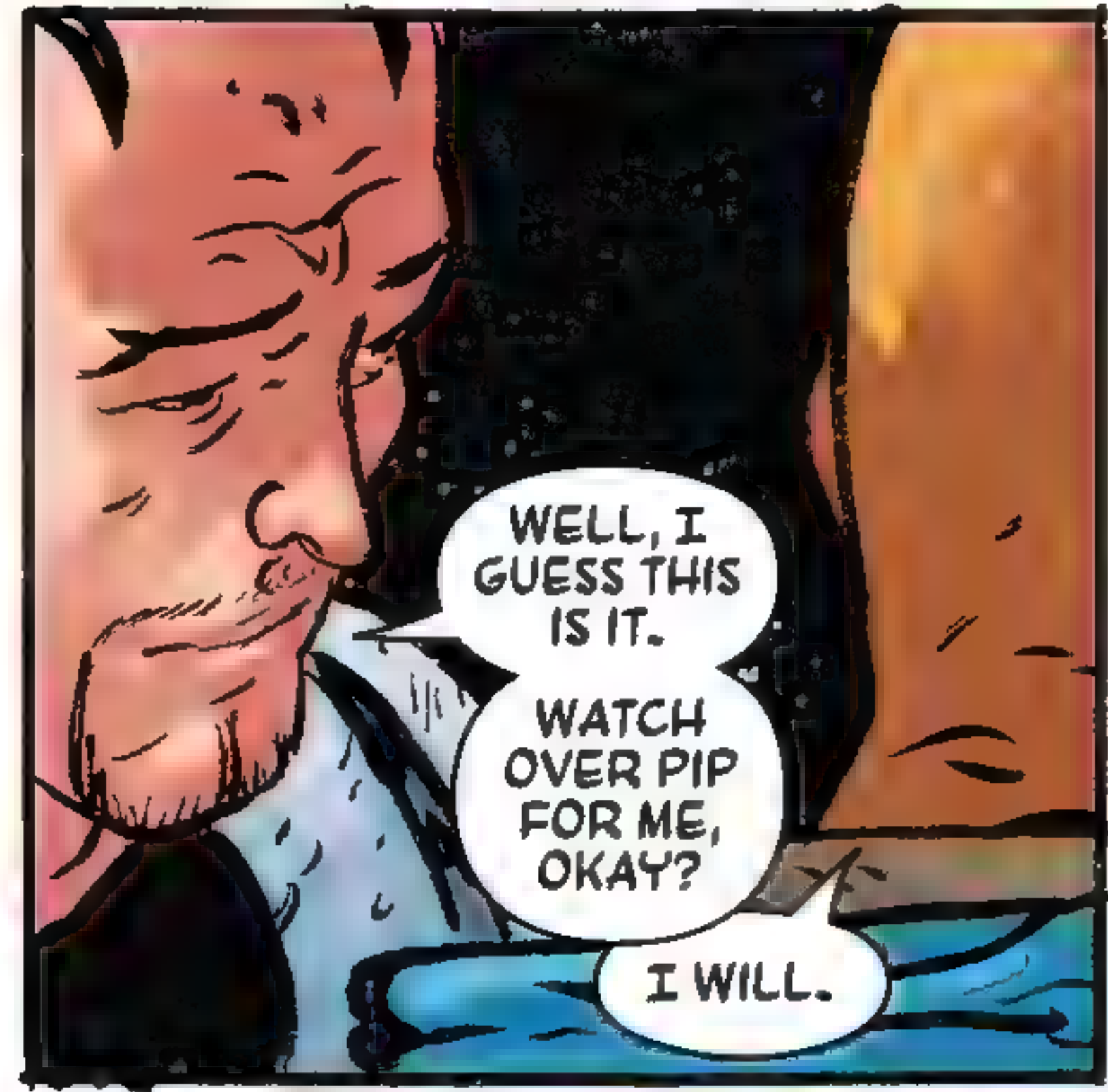
NEVER.



WE ARE IN YOUR DIMENSION NOW, KORBINITE. WE LEAVE YOU HERE.

THANK YOU FOR THE TOW, GODDESS.

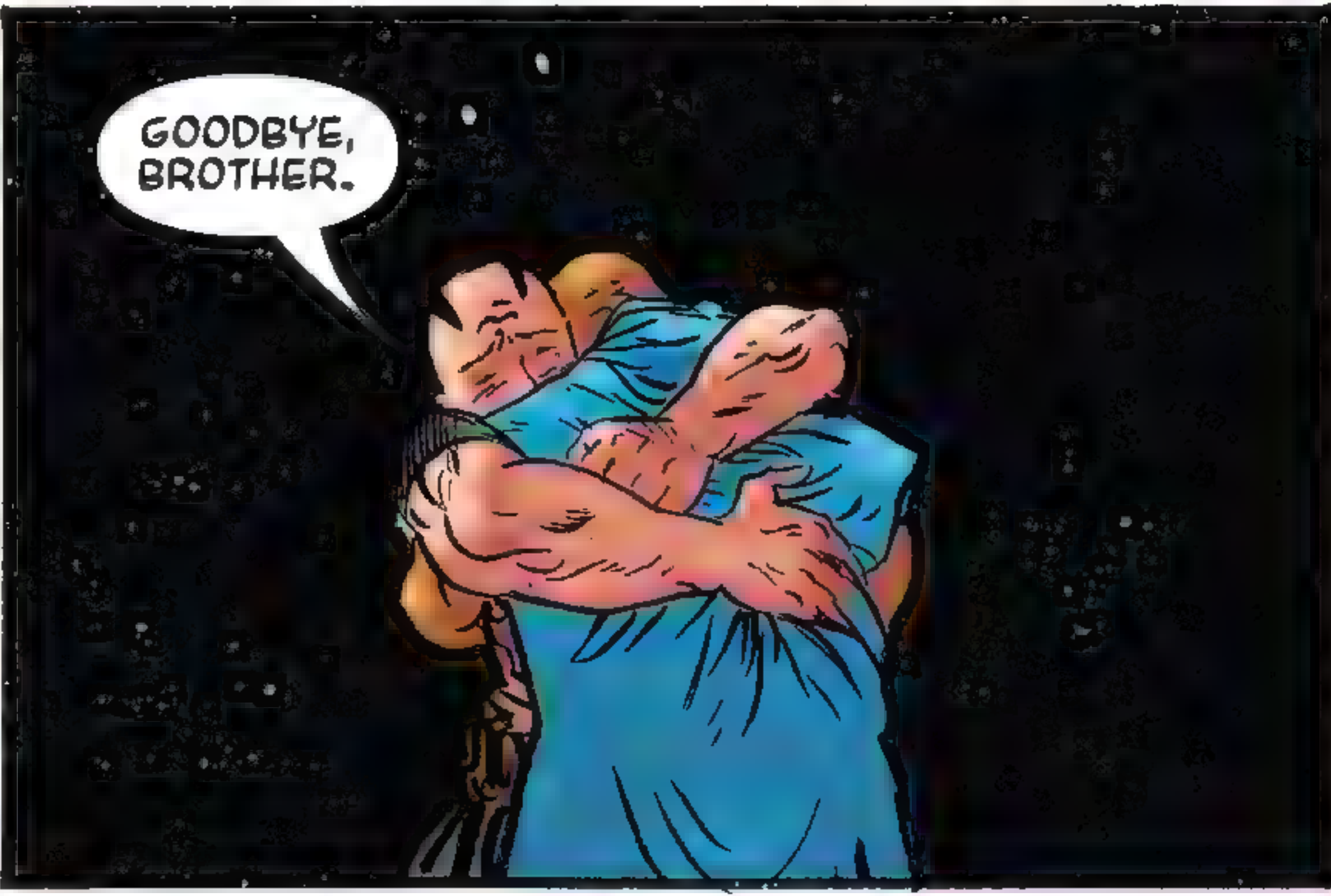
SKURGE. IT IS TIME.



WELL, I GUESS THIS IS IT.

WATCH OVER PIP FOR ME, OKAY?

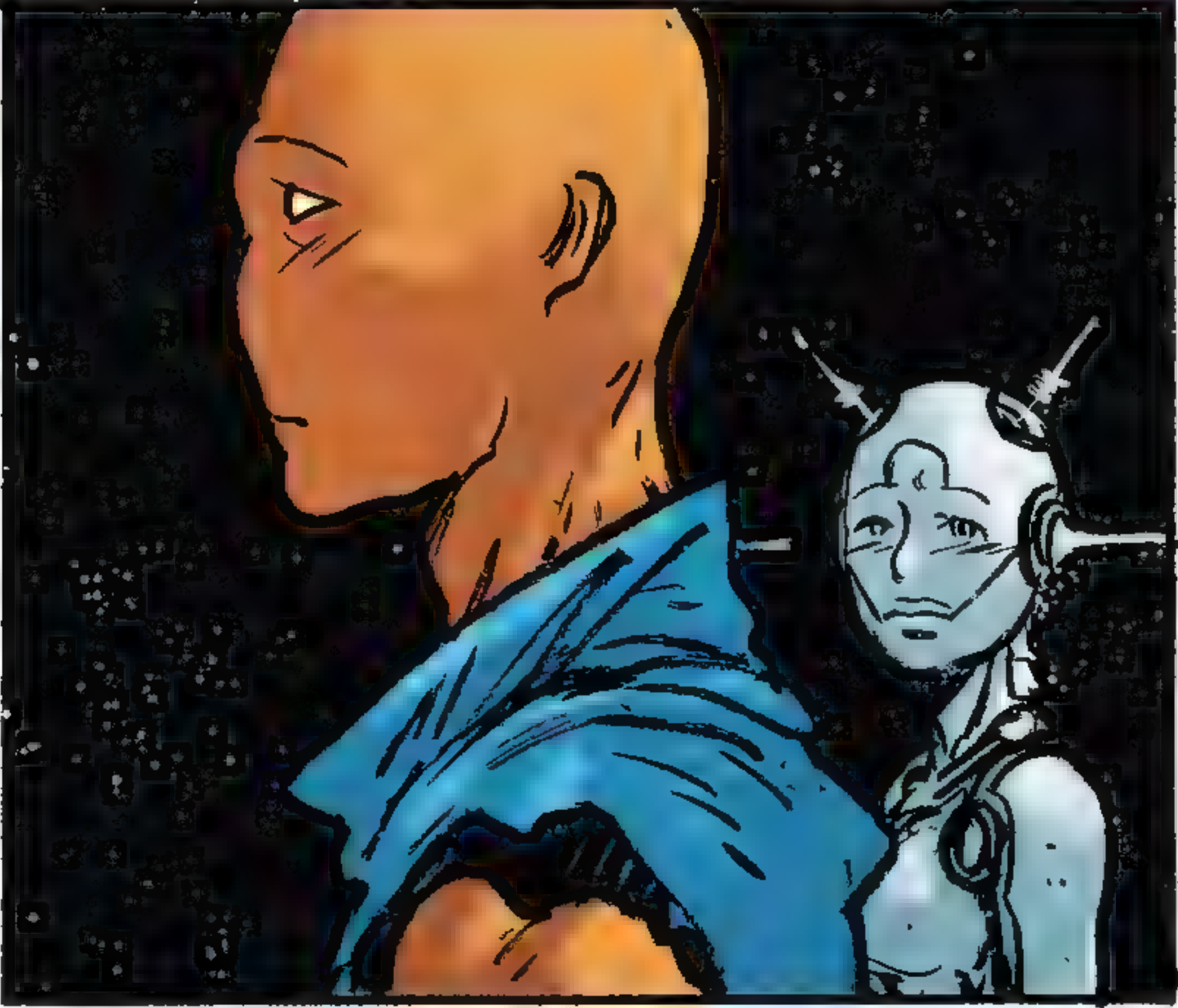
I WILL.

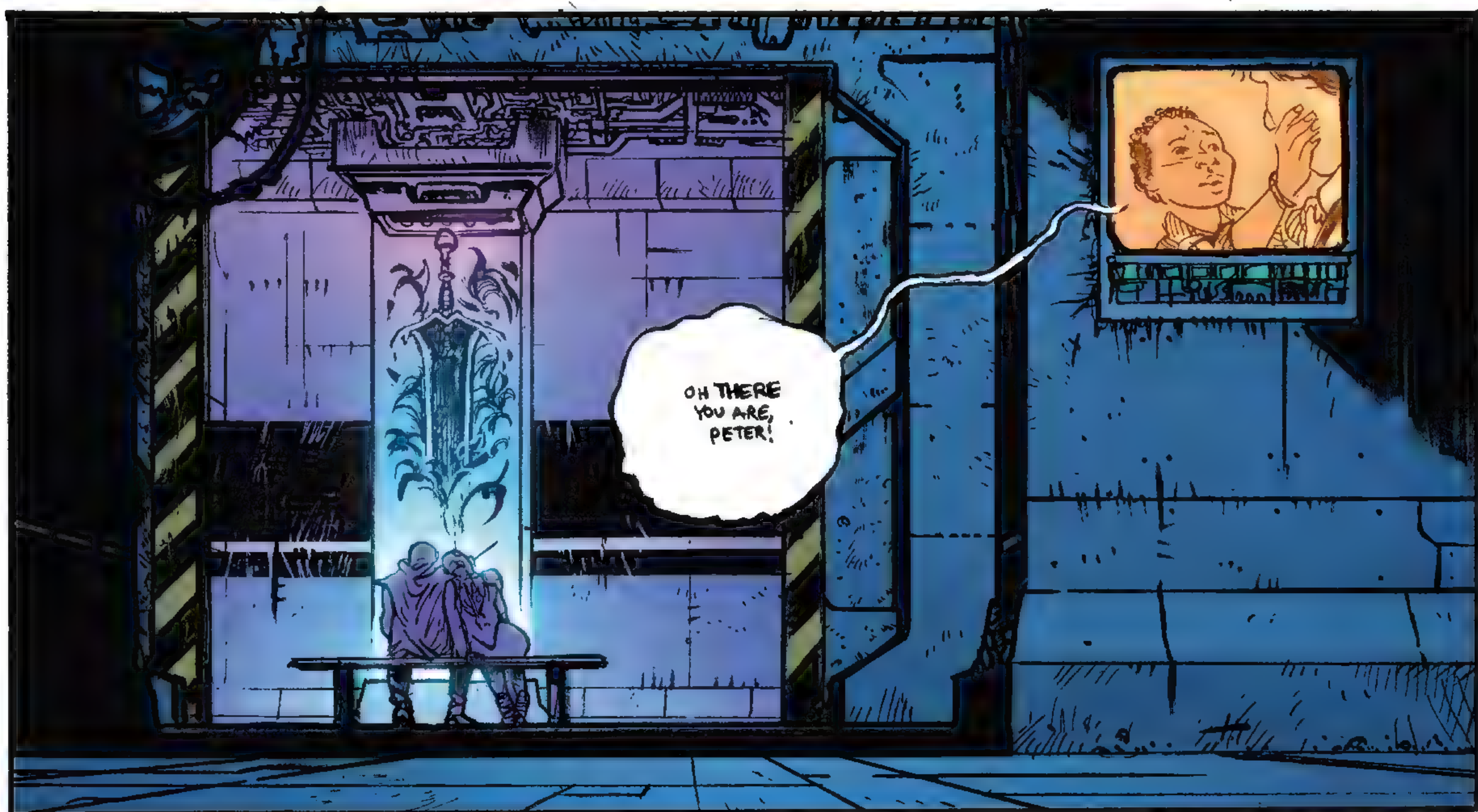
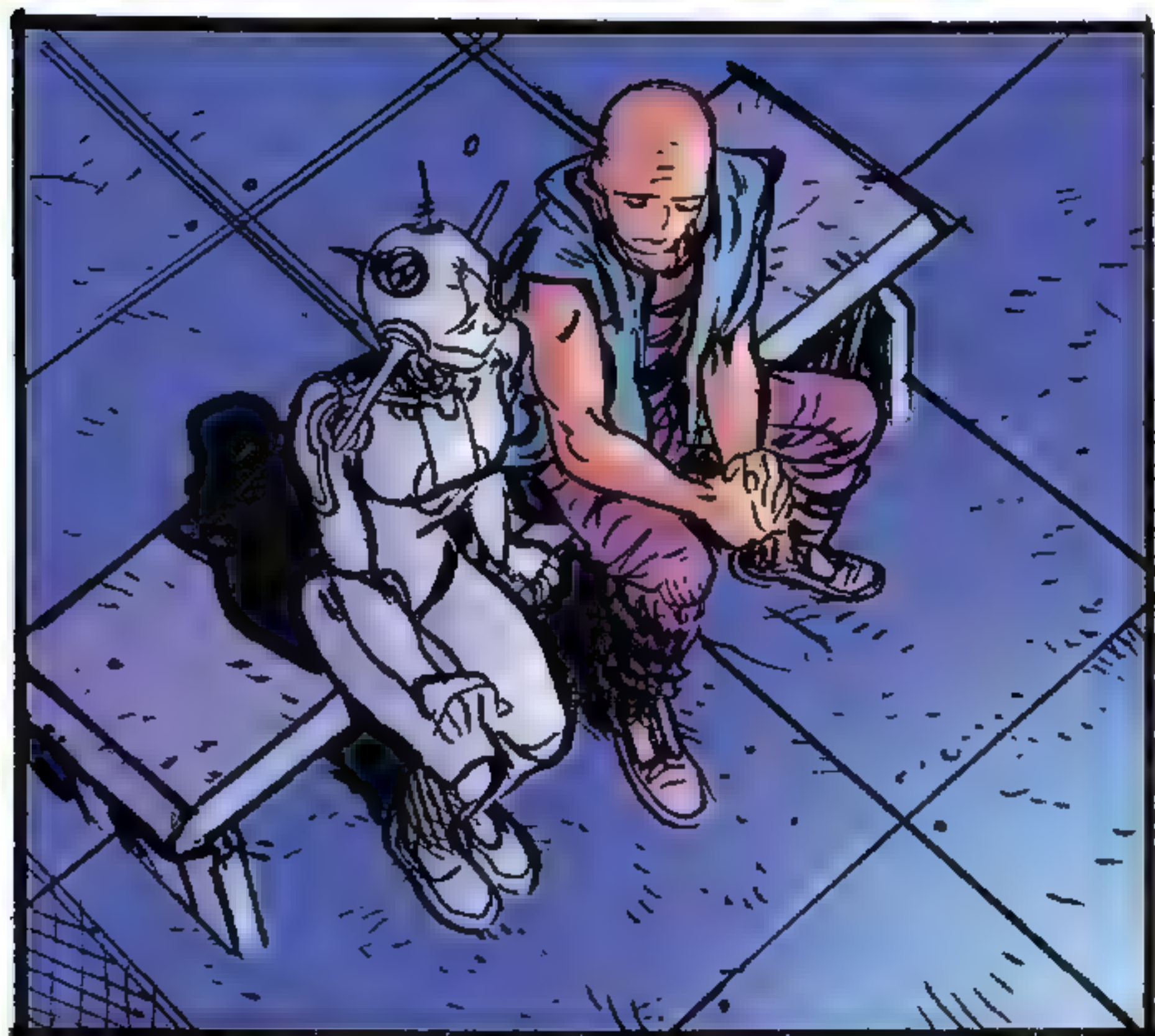
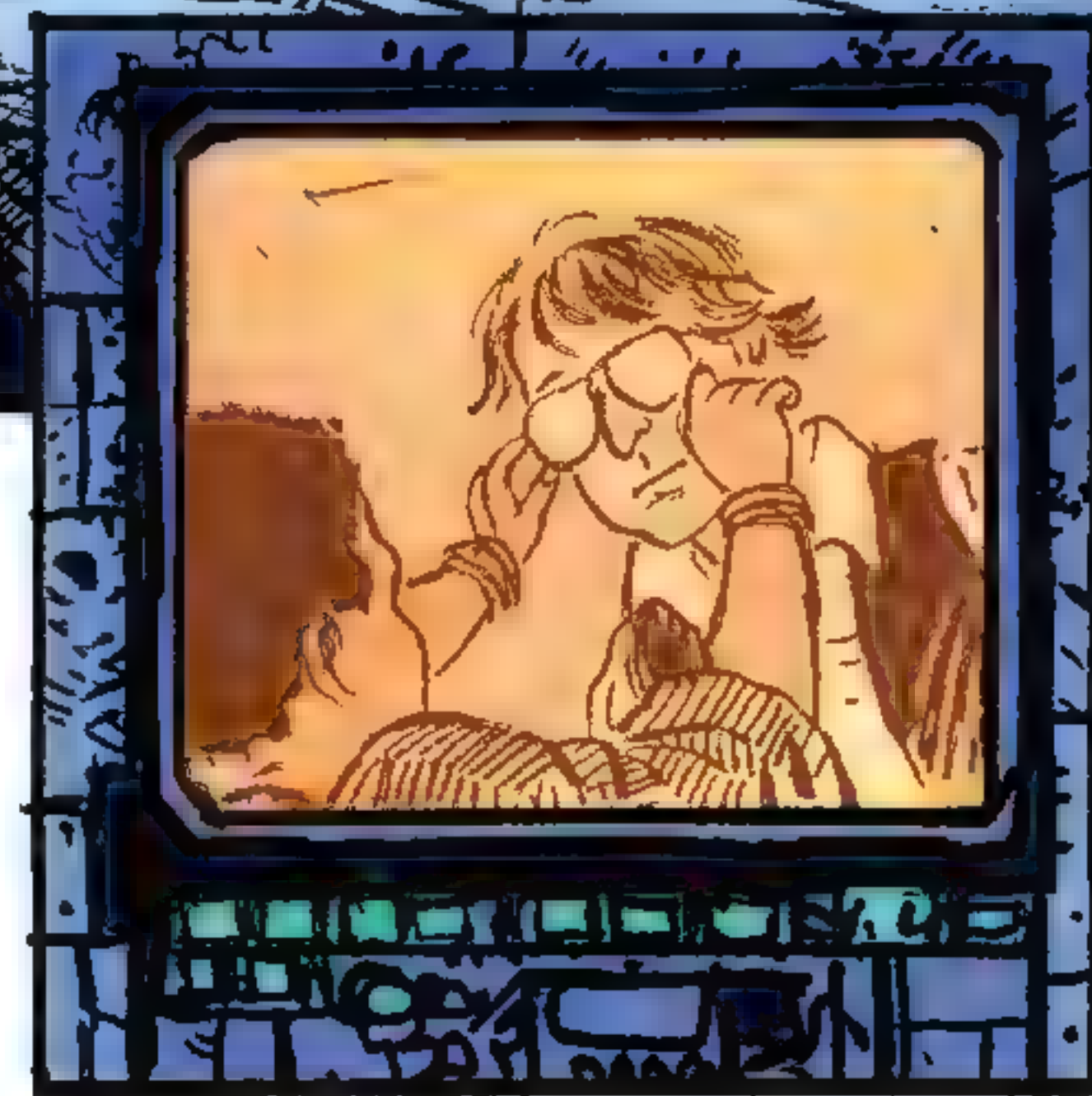
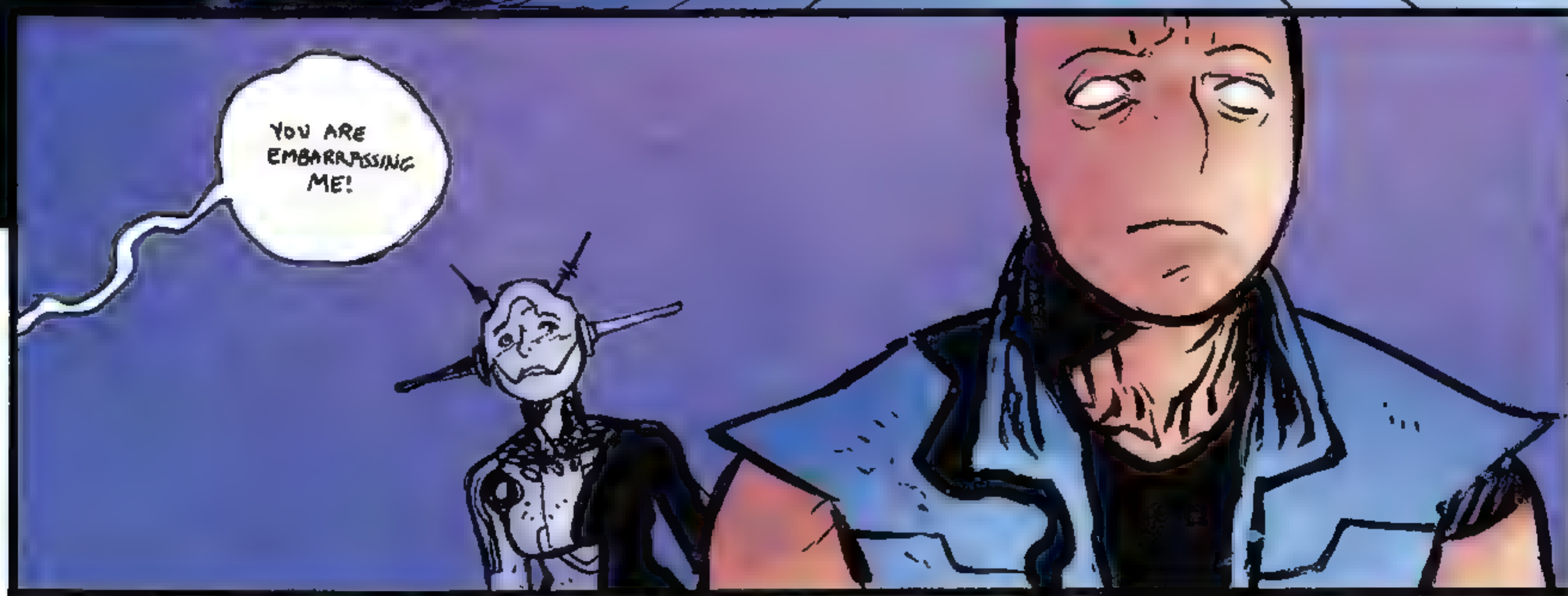


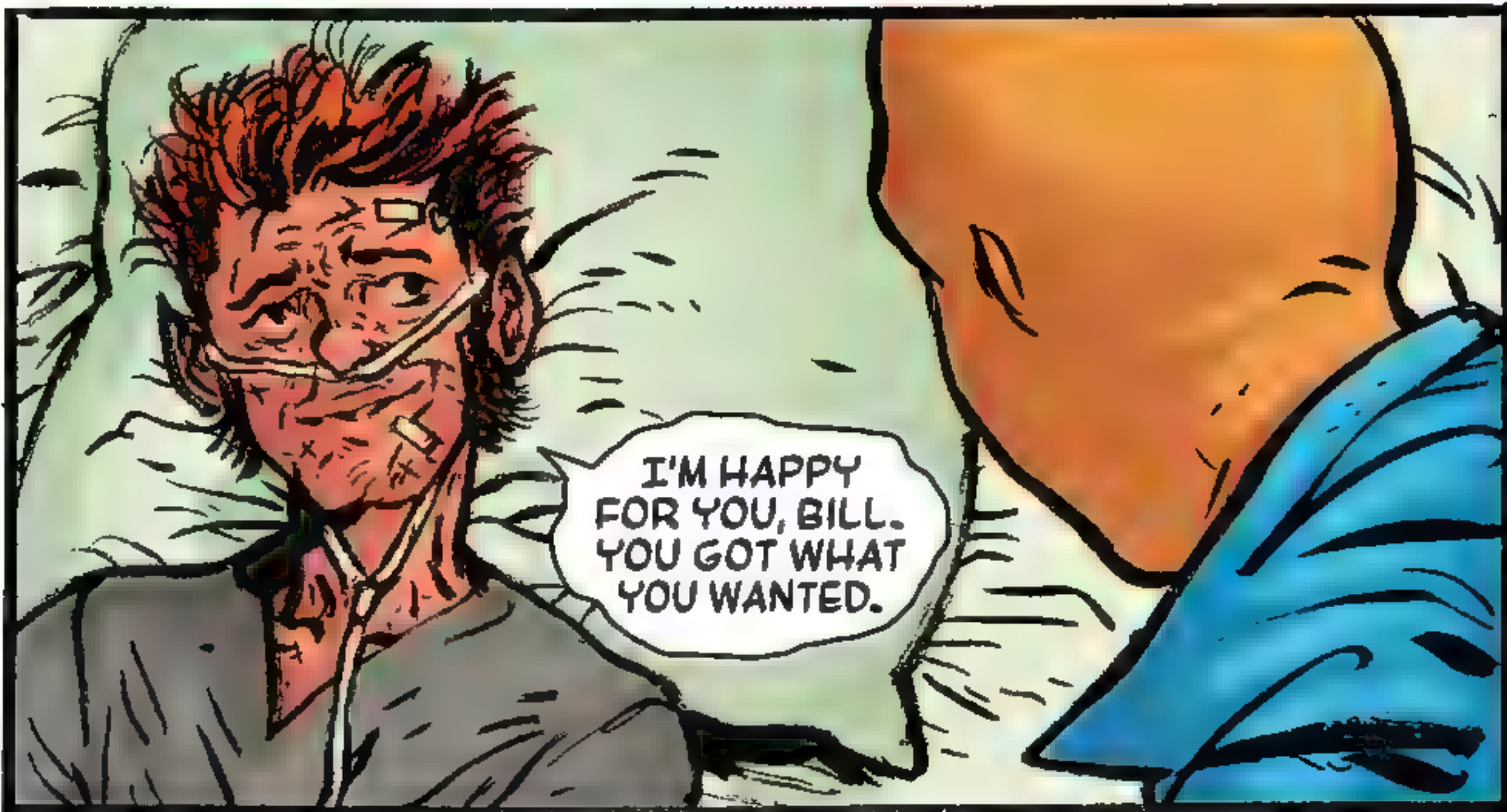
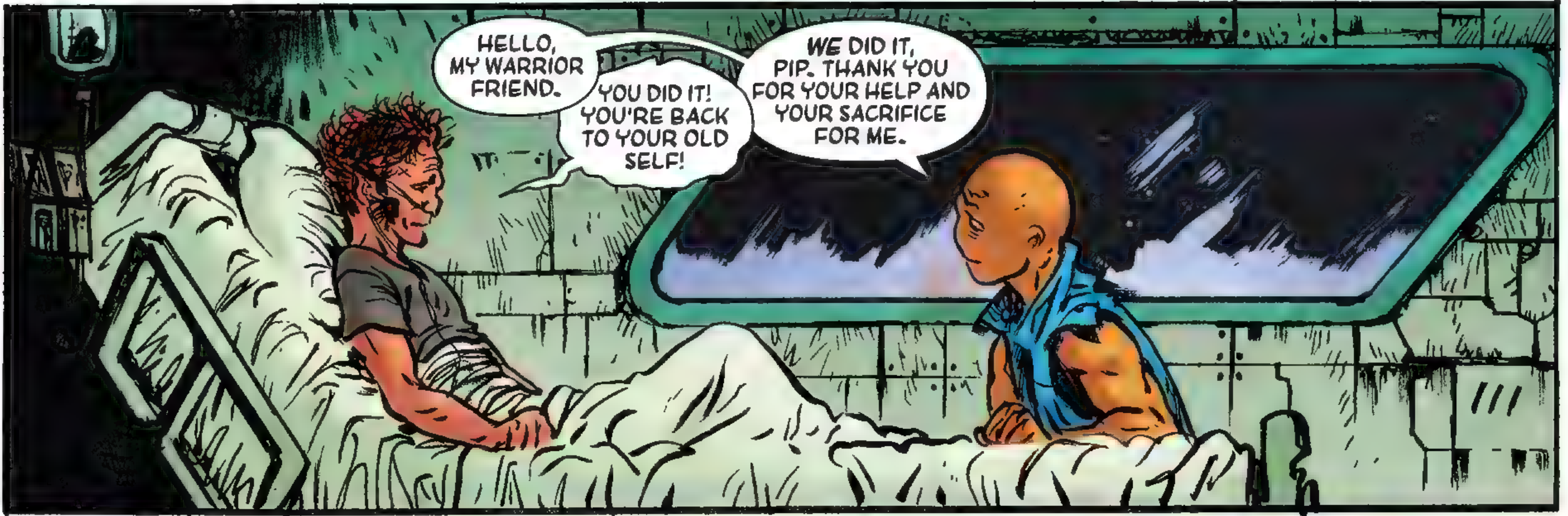
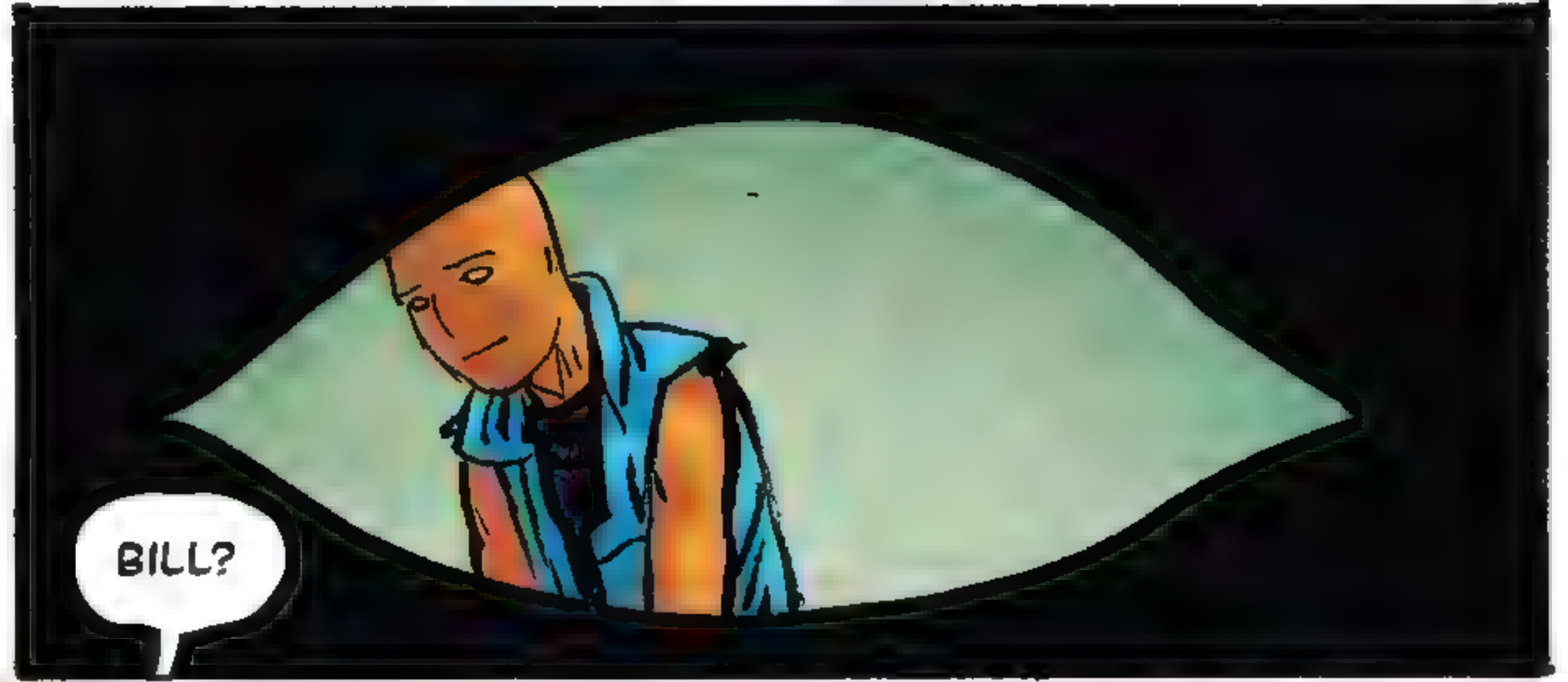
GOODBYE, BROTHER.



SHK







Hey folks! How great was **THAT?! Here at Marvel, we're thrilled Daniel Warren Johnson has been able to take some time away from making his incredibly good creator-owned comics like MURDER FALCON and EXTREMITY (and if you haven't read those, you really oughta!) to tell this epic adventure story about your favorite hero and mine, Beta Ray Bill!**

We've got a really special "bonus feature"-- an exclusive interview with Bill's creator, the legendary Walter Simonson, conducted by Daniel himself!

A fan-favorite creator pretty much since his start in the '70s all the way up to today, Walter has a long list of beloved projects to his credit (including his kickass current RAGNAROK series from IDW), chief among them a legendary run on THOR in the '80s. Bill debuted in Walter's first issue, #337, and Thor's world has never been the same since.



THE COVER OF THOR #337, BETA RAY BILL'S FIRST APPEARANCE. ART BY WALTER SIMONSON.

DANIEL WARREN JOHNSON: I heard that you attended Amherst College (very near to where I grew up, actually!), and that you did a THOR fan comic just for fun. What motivated you to create that, and were there any standout moments during your college life that pushed you into pursuing professional comics?

WALTER SIMONSON: When I was at Amherst in the mid-'60s, I discovered Marvel Comics, which had only been publishing super heroes for about four years at that

time. THOR was the first one I discovered. I was already a Norse myth fan from childhood, so I was delighted to find a comic about the gods of the Vikings. I began reading all the Marvel comics (about eleven titles a month at that time). I was inspired to try drawing some comics--a few pages of DR. STRANGE, IRON MAN, ENEMY ACE--over the next couple of years. They were all fragmentary and got longer each time I did a new one.

My first attempt with Dr. Strange was inspired by Steve Ditko's final issue on STRANGE TALES (#146) wherein Eternity and Dormammu faced off. I loved the issue but thought it was too short. (It was half the issue of STRANGE TALES.) So I decided to do the long version of the final battle that I would like to have seen. It turned out that drawing comics was hard work, and I got about four pages done before I ran out of gas. But that was my first serious attempt to draw a comic as an almost-grown-up. I did have an idea for a Thor story based on the Marvel comic and Norse myths and my own thoughts but didn't draw any of it then. During my time at Amherst, I wasn't thinking about going into comics professionally. Originally, I was interested in becoming a vertebrate paleontologist, studying dinosaurs. By the end of college, I had concluded that that was not what I wanted to do. But I had yet to begin to think of pursuing comics as a profession.

JOHNSON: Could you talk a little bit about your time in NYC in the '70s? What kind of creative culture was happening in comics with you and other creators?

SIMONSON: The '70s and the first half of the '80s were a great time to be in comics. There wasn't a lot of money, but all of us who got into the business about the time I did (1972) really wanted to work in the industry. A lot of us thought comics was a dying art, and we wanted to be part of it while it was still around. Didn't turn out that way, but we were full of enthusiasm and a friendly competitive spirit. Back then, there was no overnight delivery, no Internet, no scanners.

If you wanted to work in comics professionally, you pretty much had to live in NYC. That meant that I got to know all of the guys in my generation and a lot of the guys in previous generations whose work we all admired. When you were in the office, you saw all kinds of work being turned in by guys like Jack Kirby, John Buscema, Alex Toth, Joe Kubert, Russ Heath, Neal Adams, and all the stuff my generation was producing as well. It was very inspiring.



STRANGE TALES #146 COVER. ART BY STEVE DITKO.

JOHNSON: The first arc of your THOR run that introduced Beta Ray Bill (#337-339) feels incredibly epic. What kinds of things were inspiring you when you created this story?

SIMONSON: Mostly I was just trying to tell a story that didn't feel like it had been told before. Even then, Thor had about 20 years' worth of continuity behind him. I had the idea of somebody else picking up the hammer to utilize the inscription on Mjolnir. It hadn't really been done before, and everything else flowed from that idea. The backstory with Surtur was the tale I had developed in a rudimentary form at Amherst. I'd drawn perhaps 26 pages of it while I was in art school after Amherst, and then 14 years after that, I was able to use some of the original idea as the spine for my first 17 issues or so of THOR.

JOHNSON: Now Beta Ray Bill feels a little bit like a tongue-in-cheek

character that is beloved but also maligned as a “horse-faced hero” and so on. Was there any sense of comedy about Bill when first creating him, or was the goal simply to make an intense-looking character?

SIMONSON: Nope. One of the things that I learned from Stan Lee and Jack Kirby is that you can get away with almost anything in a story if you keep a straight face. Bill was never a comedic character to me but more a tragic one who underwent torture and isolation to save his people.

JOHNSON: One thing I noticed when beginning this BETA RAY BILL miniseries is how hard Bill is to draw! After two issues, I’m finally getting the hang of it. Did you struggle with getting his shapes down after initially creating him?

SIMONSON: Bill worked out pretty well for me from pretty early on. I’ve simplified his face a bit over the years as my own drawing has changed. One thing about his facial structure is that relatively few artists understand his jaw as I drew it. It’s not a conventional jaw but a kind of rounded gap behind his teeth, inspired by a horse’s skull. But his jaw is not hinged conventionally like a horse’s jaw. No idea how that would work in real life, but that’s comics. The only real trouble I had was keeping the directions of the zigzag white lines on his torso consistent. I could never remember which ones went up and which ones went down. Now, of course, he has a different costume so that problem is no longer around.

JOHNSON: When looking through your work on that initial Beta Ray Bill story, it seems like your lines have an energy and spontaneity to them that feels organic and lively, and it’s one of my favorite things about your drawings. Your lines look like you had fun while making them. Is this a style that you’ve always had? Did drawing with deadlines ever make you change how you approach mark-making?

SIMONSON: The answer to your first observation about my drawing is that I love marks on paper. I want to make them look like they were slashed onto the drawing—not in a

haphazard or sloppy way, but in a spontaneous way that imparts life to the drawing itself just though the marks that comprise it. As a result, I spend a lot of time making the work look spontaneous whereas in real life, as Jon Bogdanove once said, I have a very paper-intensive lifestyle. I go through a lot of stages to get to the point where the drawing looks (I hope) spontaneous.



A SPLASH PAGE FROM THE ALL-SPLASHES THOR #380. WRITING AND LAYOUTS BY WALTER SIMONSON, FINISHES BY SAL BUSCEMA, LETTERING BY JOHN WORKMAN, COLORING BY MAX SCHEELE.

As far as my approach to mark-making, the one serious effect I think drawing for comics has had on my output is that because of my early days in comics, now a long time ago, when comics were printed badly on newsprint, I developed a fairly bold style because I wanted to give the art the best chance to be reproduced on a page in a way that would still contain the energy within the drawings I was trying to achieve. I’ve gone to finer lines again and more rendering than I used 30 years ago, but some of that boldness in approach still remains, I think. Deadlines also played a role, in that writing, penciling, and drawing a book every month pushed me toward a bold approach without a lot of noodling.

JOHNSON: Nowadays it feels like it’s fairly rare for a person to do both writing and art duties on a

comic book. What was the culture like back then for someone like yourself who was both the writer and the artist? What did you find to be the biggest challenges of taking on both jobs?

SIMONSON: Back then, pretty much all the doors were open to creative endeavors in mainstream comics by freelancers. Several of us took a crack at writing and drawing mainstream books, and there was the freedom to do so. Even encouragement sometimes. It was a fine time to be doing comics professionally.

And the biggest challenge is always the deadline.

JOHNSON: As a writer, what is the first step when beginning the creative process of making a new story? As an artist, do you think in visuals first, or start somewhere else?

SIMONSON: I don’t have a single method of starting a story. Sometimes, as in the case of Beta Ray Bill and THOR where I wanted a story that hadn’t been told before, the idea of Mjolnir’s inscription came to me as I was thinking about what I might do for my first story arc. In the case of Thor fighting the Midgard Serpent (THOR #380), it came as a flash of inspiration in which the entire story and the approach of using all splash pages literally burst above my head like a light bulb. Other stories I’ve had to drag out of myself. On books that I work on for a while, new ideas often occur to me. Sometimes it’s no more than a thought; sometimes it’s a whole plot. I just have to make certain I write everything down, as I’ve learned the hard way that ideas and plots like that are as evanescent as dreams, disappearing without a trace if I don’t capture them immediately.

As a comic book artist, I pay attention to the visual storytelling first when I begin to lay out a tale. It’s all about page design, eye direction, panel composition, and how best to tell the story. With my own work, I approach it “Marvel Style,” which means that I plot my story first, thumbnail the entire job next—a quick sketch of each

page done on copier paper--and then write the script from my thumbnails so that I can see how the words and the pictures work together. Once I have a complete script, I blow up the thumbnails onto artboard, very loosely still, and then place the copy so I can be sure everything lines up. Then I start working out the visuals in detail--figures, costumes, backgrounds, architecture--everything that goes into creating a convincing space in which the story occurs.



EXAMPLES OF THE KIND OF SOUND EFFECTS WALTER SIMONSON CREATED WITH JOHN WORKMAN, FROM THOR #340. WRITING AND ART BY SIMONSON, LETTERING BY WORKMAN, COLORS BY GEORGE ROUSSOS.

JOHNSON: One of my favorite things about your art is your inclusion of sound effects and the typography used for them. Is this something that you would solely do, or did John Workman (Simonson's frequent letterer, including on his THOR run) also contribute?

SIMONSON: I got interested in letterforms while I was at the Rhode Island School of Design after Amherst. There was a certain emphasis there on lettering in those days. Chancery cursive hand--an italic alphabet based on older letterforms--was popular for a time in the late Middle Ages. A classic pamphlet called La Operina was written in and about chancery cursive by Ludovico

Vicentino Arrighi and published in 1522. Students were taught chancery from a translation of the pamphlet as a discipline, and I was interested enough in the subject that I pursued more knowledge of lettering while I was in school there. That knowledge informed my comics, and in my early professional work, I drew my own sound effects and title lettering. When John Workman and I began our collaborations, I found he could do what I wanted to do better than I could, so for the most part I handed the display lettering over to him. I write the titles and sound effects, indicate the size and placement on the art, and then it's up to John to design and letter them.

JOHNSON: As a creator who has worked steadily for so many years, how have you managed to navigate different pop culture trends and different companies? What do you think has kept you relevant all these years?

SIMONSON: Stubbornness and dumb luck.

JOHNSON: Do you find it harder to make things as you get older? Or has the process stayed mostly the same throughout your career?

SIMONSON: It's never really easy. And sometimes I feel now that I don't have the courage of my youth as an artist when a lack of knowledge emboldened me to do all kinds of things that I wouldn't try now. But I hope I make up for it by having learned a lot of tricks over the years. It's also more difficult not to feel that sometimes I am repeating myself in drawing or storytelling solutions. But one does what one can.

JOHNSON: Thanks again so much for your time, Walt. In parting, is there any advice or words of wisdom you could share with the younger generation of creators you've inspired over the decades of your career?

SIMONSON: I taught a comics class for about 11 years over a 20-year period at the School of Visual Arts in NYC. Here's my class in short. No charge, but don't tell my former students I'm giving it away for free.

1. Every time you have a question in your work about the comic you're creating--the writing or the drawing or coloring or lettering or whatever--your direction should always be: Is my answer to this question making my story better? Because that's what you should be doing in your comics--telling stories to the best of your ability. And whatever your answer, if it isn't making your story better, you need to rethink it.

2. Use reference. It'll make your drawing better. There are a million ways to do this, of course. You don't need to copy or trace a photo, but you need to learn to see the world. What you see, really see, goes through your eyes into your brain, gets scrambled, and comes back out through your hand. So you need to train both your eye and your hand and their interaction with your brain, because that is what makes both training and improvement possible.

3. Comics is hard work. Get used to it.



BETA RAY BILL #1 VARIANT COVER ART BY WALTER SIMONSON, COLORS BY LAURA MARTIN.

Okay, that's all we have room for here! For the full interview, including what work of Walter's long, celebrated career he is most proud of, go to Marvel.com! And if you haven't read Walter's classic THOR run, it's available in trade paperback and on Marvel Unlimited -- trust me, it's every bit as insanely awesome as you've heard. - Wil

“This is a tale steeped in the past but paving a new direction for Beta Ray Bill and comic storytelling.” — Comic Crusaders

THE SECOND-MOST FAMOUS WIELDER OF **MJOLNIR!**

BETA RAY BILL IS TIRED OF LIFE IN THOR’S SHADOW — and with Bill’s own mighty hammer, Stormbreaker, recently destroyed at the thunder god’s hands, Bill finds himself at a crossroads. The Korbinite must strike out in search of his destiny — assuming he can first defeat a Knullified Fin Fang Foom! Bill begins a hunt for Odin in hopes of resurrecting his golden weapon — but Stormbreaker is never coming back. Nonetheless, there is one place where Beta Ray Bill could restore his full powers. The All-Father of Nothing offers the Korbinite a path to immortality — but at a price not even a god can afford! Who will join Bill on a dangerous and deadly cosmic quest?



COLLECTING **BETA RAY BILL #1-5** — BY DANIEL WARREN JOHNSON AND MIKE SPICER.

